THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY IN PERSONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Proceedings of the Australian Psychology Society’s Psychology of Relationships Interest Group 5th Annual Conference

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Psychology of Relationships Interest Group
5th Annual Conference

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The papers contained in these proceedings have been subject to a blind peer-review process.
Welcome from the Chair of the Conference Committee

On behalf of the National Committee and the Conference Organising Committee of the APS Psychology of Relationships Interest Group, I welcome you to this the Fifth Annual Conference of the Psychology of Relationships Interest Group.

Our aim for this year’s conference was to provide a forum with an emphasis on The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly in Personal, National and International Relationships. As individuals and as members of identifiable groups we are involved in a multiplicity of relationships. While many of the relationships in which we participate are extremely positive and bring us our greatest joys, some are not as successful and bring us our tears and our sorrows.

This year we are honoured to have Rosalie Pattenden from Relationships Australia and Alan Hayes from the Australian Institute of Family Studies as our Keynote Speakers. Selected through a refereed process, a diversity of papers to be presented at the Conference include two international authors – one from the People’s Republic of China and one from New Zealand.

The individual presentations along with our two Keynote addresses attest to the theme. As in other years, the independently refereed proceedings of the Conference will be published later in this calendar year.

Finally let me thank you the participants for your attendance at our 5th Annual Conference. It is your participation and attendance that enables the Interest Group to meet some of the needs of its members as well as provide an excellent opportunity for those with an interest in the development of our own research, practice, and personal relationships as well.

Regards

Barry J Fallon PhD FAPS
Chair, Conference Organising Committee
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Young Adults’ Adjustment to University: The Role of Parental Support, Intimacy and Attachment

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Abstract

Numerous studies have examined the important role that parents provide in assisting young adults adjust to the often stressful transition to university. Attachment theory has provided a useful framework in understanding the function of parents during this period of heightened stress, however, few studies have examined how young adults’ preparedness to seek emotional intimacy from parents may further assist in adjusting to the pressures of university. The current study examined young adults’ attachment bonding and intimacy with parents across a sample of 85 first year university students ($M = 19.10$, $SD = .80$). Findings revealed that young adult’s parental attachment and feelings of intimacy differentially predicted the degree of paternal and maternal support perceived by first year tertiary students. Furthermore, paternal and maternal intimacy were found to predict young adults’ adjustment to university. In addition, maternal attachment was found to predict first year students’ university adjustment. Interestingly, parental support was not found to mediate young adults’ parental attachment and intimacy on university adjustment. Results are discussed in reference to attachment theory and Eriksonian psychosocial development.

Young adulthood is regarded by many developmentalists as comprising of numerous life transitions that involve the negotiation of many complex developmental tasks (e.g., Havighurst, 1976, Levinson, 1986). While various tasks such as the development of adult romantic relationships, moving out of the family home and entering the workforce are regarded as normative, these tasks are often deemed stressful by young adults due to their lack of experience in dealing with such life transitions.

A life transition particularly pertinent to young adults is the transition from high school to university, as students are expected to display a greater degree of independence and autonomy in responding to increased academic demands while negotiating a complex new social environment (Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). In an effort to identify the factors involved in adjustment during college transition, researchers have proposed that students with a robust and healthy sense of themselves as agentic and independent would more successfully handle the demands of university life, such as dealing with new social environment, actively participating in classes and managing study workload (Mattanah et al., 2004).

Studies examining young adults’ transition to university found that college students possessing strong attachment bonds with parents tended to report better adjustment to college socially, emotionally and academically than their insecure peers (Kenny, 1987; Wintre & Sugar, 2000). In contrast, insecurely attached students were found to be at risk for early dropout during transition to college (Lopez & Gormley, 2002).

Given that parents are still regarded as the primary attachment figure for many young people in early adulthood (Weiss, 1982) it is important to determine the level of support that young people ask of a caregiver to assist in the adjustment to university. The willingness to rely on support from others depends on the degree of perceived quality of the relationship, as providers of support can either augment or destabilise an individual’s sense of relatedness and competence, depending on the manner in which support is offered to the recipient (Ryan & Solky, 1996). The majority of findings suggest that secure styles of adult attachment, along with memories of one’s parents as being emotionally responsive and supportive of autonomy are related to higher levels of perceived social support in adults (Coble, Gantt & Mallinckrodt, 1990).

Attachment theory provides a useful platform to explore young people’s social support seeking strategies during periods of stress and transition. However, it seems equally important to consider the effect of normative and non-normative personality development on young adults’ abilities to engage in care-seeking behaviour, bearing in mind that the need to demonstrate independence from parents may result in avoidance of support seeking when stressed, even though assistance may actually be desired (Allen & Land, 1999). Given the lack of integration between research and theory on the psychosocial study of parent-child intimacy and support, it is important to develop a conceptual framework to investigate this form of intimacy in young adulthood.

Therefore, the aim of the present study is to investigate the effects of young adults’ parental attachment and intimacy on adjustment to university as mediated by perceived parental support.
Parental Attachment, Social Support and University Adjustment

Young adults’ attachment to their parents has been established as an important variable that facilitates normative adjustment to the stressors commonly associated with many of developmental tasks characteristic of early adulthood (Ptacek, 1996). It is proposed by attachment theory that early experiences with caregivers lead to either adaptive or maladaptive ways of dealing with negative emotions and situations across the life-span (Bowlby, 1969).

According to Bowlby (1977) attachment theory is a method of conceptualising the tendency for human beings to form strong affectional bonds towards particular others and explaining the emotional distress resulting from the threatened dissolution of the bond with the attachment figure. The formation of an attachment bond is contingent upon an individual's cognitive construction of their experiences with their attachment figure. Numerous studies into the nature of attachment internal working models suggest that attachment bonding is derived on the basis of two independent complementary mental representations termed avoidance and anxiety. The avoidance model assesses the level to which an individual expects others to be available and supportive and is therefore associated with the capacity to seek out or avoid closeness in relationships (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The anxiety model is related to the level of anxiety experienced by the individual due to uncertainty surrounding their opinions of being worthy of care and affection (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Research to date suggests that the internal working models of avoidance and anxiety can be conceptualised as two orthogonal continuous dimensions (e.g., Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998; Erwin, Salter & Purves, 2004).

There is growing evidence to suggest that attachment is associated with young adults’ abilities to engage in social support during periods of stress over the life-course (Ptacek, 1996). Specifically, research has found that young people characterised by a secure attachment are more likely to engage and perceive social support during times of heightened stress, whereas insecure young adults are less likely to ask their caregivers for such assistance (e.g., Florian & Mikulincer, 1995). However, few studies have specifically examined how young adults turn to their parents for social support caused by the stress associated with life-transitions (Florian & Mikulincer, 1995).

The few studies that have investigated the link between attachment and parental support during a life transition such as university adjustment argue that young adults who experienced secure, supportive parenting learn the skills and competencies required for academic achievement and successful adjustment (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline & Russell, 1994). Results indicated the aspect of parental support that contributed most to academic achievement was reassurance of worth, suggesting that parental recognition and expression of faith in their young adult’s capabilities may assist adaptive behaviours in college adjustment (Cutrona et al, 1994).

The majority of research investigating the link between attachment and parental support during university transition has examined attachment on the basis of two or three categorical approaches, essentially delineating attachment styles into secure or insecure. In doing so, researchers have failed to investigate attachment from either the prototypical model of attachment utilising four differential attachment patterns (secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing), or the two dimensions of anxiety and avoidance on which the prototypical approach is based (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Furthermore, studies of university transition have been largely concerned with the young adults’ separation from parents as an influence on college adjustment (Kenny, 1987) rather than assessing the support seeking practices of young adults during this stressful time regardless of distance from their parents, an aim of the present study.

Parental Intimacy, Social Support and University Adjustment

A fruitful theoretical platform to understand the importance of filial intimacy is Erikson’s psychosocial theory of intimacy development. According to Erikson (1968), early adulthood is characterised by a period during which young people develop a sense of individuation, but are also thrust into consolidating skills necessary in fostering fulfilling close personal relationships – both filial and romantic (Orlofsky, 1993). Erikson proposed a stage theory of development encompassing eight phases termed ‘crises’ (Erikson, 1968). These crises comprise of adaptive and maladaptive trajectories of development, for example the psychosocial development of intimacy is said to result in either the confidence of seeking intimate personal relationships or the withdrawal and defensiveness of isolation. Although it is often assumed that the crisis presented by this stage of individuation results in one of the two polar outcomes, individuals are seldom “completely intimate or completely isolated” and are unlikely to develop a total capacity for intimacy or completely acquiesce to isolation (Orlofsky, 1993, p. 113).

While research suggests that the attainment of “individuation” is related to the types of social support that young adult’s seek from parents, (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel & Geisinger, 1995) research has neglected to investigate how young’s people’s development of intimacy maybe associated with their willingness to receive different types of support from a caregiver. Given that intimacy maybe construed as “comfort with closeness” (Feeney, Noller & Hanrahan, 1994), and is considered central to certain types of social support (Sarason, Pierce & Sarason, 1990) it seems reasonable to assume that it may play just as important a role as attachment in one’s
ability to ask or perceived the availability of highly personal support from a significant other such as a parent. While it has been found that insecurely attached college students do not effectively utilise support available from parents during times of stress (Kenny, 1987) the support seeking behaviour of young adults in relation to parents has not been examined in the light of intimacy development, a further aim of the current study.

Both attachment theory and the psychosocial development of intimacy in early adulthood examine the emotional aspects associated with parent-child bonding. Therefore, it seems useful to consider both theoretical frameworks in order to develop a more complete understanding of the interpersonal processes that underlie young adult’s social support seeking behaviour and as a consequence, adjustment to a normative life transition, such as embarking upon higher education. On this basis it was hypothesised that the effects of attachment and intimacy on university adjustment would be mediated by young adults’ views of perceived parental support (as shown in Figure 1). More specifically it was argued that the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance would be negatively related to perceived parental support while intimacy was positively related. Finally it was hypothesised that higher levels of perceived parental support would be associated with higher (i.e., more adaptive) university adjustment for young adults.

![Figure 1. Hypothesised Psychosocial Mediation Model of University Adjustment.](image)

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 85 first year psychology students, from a Melbourne metropolitan and Victorian regional campus of Swinburne University of Technology (SUT). Participants ranged in age from 18.00 to 21.25 years ($M=19.10$, $SD=.80$). Of these participants, 7 were male ($M=19.29$, $SD=.96$) and 78 were female ($M=19.08$, $SD=.79$). Prior to commencing university studies most students lived in Melbourne (84.7%) with the remaining 15.3% living in rural Victoria. Most students also co-resided with parents before beginning university (96.5%) whereas this proportion dropped to 84.7% once studies commenced, taking into account the relocation of rural students and a minority of Melbourne students leaving home. The majority of participants were full time students (94.1%) with the remainder being part time (5.9%).

**Materials**

The questionnaire booklet issued to participants consisted of nine measures. The first assessed student background, followed by eight self-report questionnaires measuring: Parental attachment, parental intimacy, perceived parental support and university adjustment.

The background questionnaire consisted of eleven items including sex; age; country of birth of self, mother and father; course and enrolment status; work status; prior and current places of residence and co-residers. A modified version of the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR) by Brennan et al (1998) was used in order to assess young adults’ attachment to their parents. This measure is generally used to assess attachment anxiety and avoidance in romantic relationships, however items pertaining to romantic relationships were adjusted to assess parent-child attachment. The modified version of the ECR consisted of 32 items (18 avoidance and 14 anxiety) and the modified subscales showed acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach alphas of .93 and .83 for avoidance and anxiety respectively. As with the original version of the ECR, items were rated along a seven point analogue scale ranging from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 7 (I strongly agree).

Intimacy was measured with a modified version of the intimacy subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory scale (EPSI) by Rosenthal, Gurney and Moore (1981). The 12 item intimacy subscale was reworded to assess parental rather than romantic intimacy. Two items from the original intimacy subscale were deleted as there was no analogous wording to constitute the items’ inclusion in the measurement of parent-child intimacy. Responses were rated on a five-point scale from 1 (hardly ever true) to 5 (almost always true). As with the ECR, participants were administered this questionnaire twice to assess paternal and maternal intimacy. Reliability analysis of modified version of the EPSI revealed acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach alphas of .75 and .62 for the maternal and paternal versions of intimacy subscale.

Perceived parental support was assessed via the Family Support Scale (FSS) by Wills, Vaccaro and McNamara (1992). The scale consisted of 15 items measuring emotional (7 items) and instrumental (8 items) parental support during college years. Items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 4
(strongly disagree). The scale was re-worded to read “mother” and “father” instead of “parent” and thus required to fill in the questionnaire twice. The scale was reported to have an internal consistency of $\alpha = .91$ and $\alpha = .93$ for the maternal and paternal versions respectively.

Adjustment to university was measured using two scales, the Stressful Situations Questionnaire (SSQ) (Hodges & Felling, 1970) and the Self Efficacy Scale (SES) (Sherer et al., 1982). Of the total 40 items comprising the SSQ, only 19 were used in the present study due to their direct relevance to situations common to college students. These items, were re-worded to reflect Australian rather than the American vernacular. Items were scored along a five-point scale from 1 (None at all) to 5 (Extreme). The current study revealed that the scale had adequate reliability with an internal consistency of Cronbach’s alpha $= .82$.

The (SES) consisted of 23 items measuring general and social self efficacy plus 7 filler items. The responses were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 5 (Agree strongly). Filler items were changed to more adequately fit the experience of Australian rather than American university students, though the responses were not included in the computation of student’s self-efficacy scores. The scale had adequate reliability in the present study with an internal consistency of Cronbach’s alpha $= .79$.

**Procedure**

The researcher attended First Year Psychology lectures at the two SUT campuses with the purpose of inviting willing participants to take part in the study. A short presentation was made to the students outlining the aims of the investigation and associated procedures, including informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, however students completing the questionnaire received credit towards a Research Experience Program (REP) associated with the course. Return of the completed questionnaire, by reply paid envelope, was accepted as confirmation of informed consent.

**Results**

Path analysis using AMOS 5.0 computer software (Arbuckle, 2003) was employed to assess the direct and indirect effects of the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance and parental intimacy. Path analysis was the analytic method of choice over mediation conducted using multiple regression to account for measurement error and possible interrelationships across independent variables.

Generally, path analysis is not used for small samples with an $N<100$ due to concerns of inaccurate parameter estimation (Tabachnick & Fiddel, 1996). Nevertheless, the statistical power and stability of parameter estimates in path analytic models is based on the ratio of participants (N) to parameters estimated (p) rather than an absolute sample size (Tanaka, 1987). Bentler and colleagues (e.g., Chou & Bentler, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1995) advocate the view that five cases per parameter estimate is a sufficient ratio to yield accurate parameter estimates. In the present study, 15 parameters were estimated using a sample size of 83 resulting in an N:p ratio of 5.5. Thus, the sample size was deemed adequate for the use of path analysis.

The data was screened for missing values, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, normality and univariate and multivariate outliers. Missing values were replaced with the series mean while an analysis of multivariate outliers revealed two cases that warranted deletion. All variables satisfied conditions of univariate and multivariate normality. Some bivariate relationships yielded very high correlations, however, the assumption of multicollinearity (i.e., $r \geq .90$, tolerance < .10) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996) was not violated (see Table 1).

Bivariate correlations amongst the variables are presented in Table 1 along with means and standard deviations. Relationships between the variables pertaining to young adults’ perceptions of maternal attachment, intimacy, support with university adjustment are presented above the diagonal in Table 1, while young adults’ corresponding relationships amongst these variables for fathers are presented below the diagonal.

Path analyses for young adults’ mother and father ratings for attachment, intimacy and parental support on adjustment were conducted separately for ease of interpretation and the comparison of mother and father effects. The models were estimated using Maximum Likelihood Estimation and evaluated according to the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) as recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999) when analysing models with sample sizes $\leq 250$. The initial models were improved through model respecification on the basis of theory and Modification Indices by freeing parameter estimates.
Mediation Model of University Adjustment: Maternal Influences

The final respecified model (see Figure 2) analysing the direct and indirect effects of young adults’ maternal attachment, intimacy and perceived support on university adjustment suggests a good fit to the sample data resulting in a non-significant chi-square statistic $X^2(2) = 3.664$, $p > .05$ and a CFI = .989 and SRMR = .086.

Figure 2 illustrates that maternal support did not mediate university adjustment for young adults. Rather 18% of the variance in university adjustment was accounted by the direct effects of attachment avoidance, anxiety and intimacy. Interestingly, higher maternal avoidance related to improved university adjustment for young adults. In contrast, the higher young adults’ maternal anxiety the poorer their adjustment to university. Furthermore, a strong positive relationship was found between maternal intimacy and university adjustment.

While maternal support did not predict university adjustment, 56% of the variance in maternal perceived support was predicted by maternal avoidance with higher levels of maternal avoidance associated with higher levels of perceived maternal support. In addition, a strong negative correlation was found between intimacy and avoidance suggesting high levels of maternal intimacy is associated with low levels of maternal attachment avoidance.

#### Table 1

**Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations**

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<td>-.81***</td>
<td>.85***</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>-.58**</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.75**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>.84**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

Mean (Mother): 2.59 2.64 34.86 28.13 125.78*  
SD (Mother): 1.34 .79 5.19 8.03 16.79*  
Mean (Father): 3.24 2.66 32.41 32.23 -  
SD (Father): 1.26 .79 4.22 9.10 -

Note: Bivariate correlations above the diagonal relate to young adults’ rating regarding mother, below relate to father.  
* university adjustment measure was rated once as the final outcome variable.  
* $p < .05$ (2-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

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* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.  
Note: For clarity of interpretation error terms not indicated.

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**Note:** Dotted lines indicate non-significant paths.
Mediation Model of University Adjustment: Paternal Influences

The final respecified model (see Figure 3) analysing the direct and indirect effects of young adults’ paternal attachment, intimacy and support on university adjustment also represents a good fit to the sample data, resulting in a non-significant chi-square statistic $\chi^2(2) = 2.954, p > .05$ and a CFI = .994 and SRMR = .072.

Note: For clarity of interpretation error terms not indicated.
Note: Dotted lines indicate non-significant paths.
*p < .05; ** p < .01.

Figure 3. Mediation Model of University Adjustment: Paternal Influences.

Consistent with the model analysing the maternal influences on young adults’ university adjustment, paternal perceived support was not found to mediate the effects of attachment and intimacy. Rather, 19% of the variance in first year students’ university adjustment was directly attributed to paternal intimacy (see Figure 3). Surprisingly, paternal attachment (i.e., avoidance and anxiety) was not found to have a direct impact on university adjustment.

However, young adults’ paternal attachment was found to predict paternal support, with avoidance and anxiety contributing 79% of the variance. In line with the model analysing maternal influences (see Figure 2) higher levels of paternal avoidance were associated with higher levels of perceived paternal support. Attachment anxiety was found to have an inverse relationship with paternal support. As with the maternal influences on young adults’ university adjustment, a strong negative correlation was found between paternal avoidance and intimacy.

Discussion

In contrast to the study hypothesis, perceived parental support was not found to mediate the effects of attachment and intimacy on university adjustment. Rather, young adults’ maternal attachment and intimacy were found to have a direct effect on university adjustment. In particular, low levels of maternal attachment anxiety, high maternal avoidance and maternal intimacy were associated with improved university adjustment. Furthermore, paternal intimacy was also found to have a direct relationship with adjustment to university with higher levels of paternal intimacy associated with higher levels of university adjustment.

In relation to the hypothesised relationships between attachment and intimacy with perceived parental support, the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance were found to be the only significant predictors. Maternal perceived support was solely predicted by attachment avoidance. In contrast to expectations, higher levels of avoidance was associated with perceptions of greater maternal support. Paternal perceived support was influenced by both avoidance and anxiety. Like maternal perceived support, attachment avoidance was positively related while, in line with expectations, anxiety was negatively related, indicating that low levels of paternal anxiety was associated with perceptions of greater paternal support.

While mediation models to university adjustment have not been empirically tested in research, the current study supports previous findings that attachment is directly associated with young adults’ perceptions regarding social support during times of heightened stress (Ptacek, 1996; Wintre & Sugar, 2000) and optimal adjustment to university (e.g., Cutrona et al, 1994; Mattanah et al, 2004; Wintre & Sugar, 2000).

Nevertheless, a peculiar finding of the current study was the direct positive relationship of parental attachment avoidance on perceived parental support and maternal avoidance on university adjustment. On the basis of theory and past research, it seems plausible to assume that low levels of attachment avoidance would give rise to perceptions of greater parental support and improvements in university adjustment (e.g., Kenny, 1987; Lopez & Gormley, 2002). However, the positive relationship between attachment avoidance and perceived parental support and university adjustment may be attributable to the normative developmental process of
individuation whereby young adults strive for emotional independence from parents and attempt to establish themselves and achieving mature relations outside the family unit (e.g., Havighurst, 1972; Sugarman, 1986).

Further to this point, there may exist inherent limitations in the measurement of attachment avoidance in the present study. While the items in the original ECR used to assess romantic relationships were changed to reflect familial attachment, the instrument may still operationalise high levels of interdependence as a desirable feature of later familial attachment. Although dependency is regarded as an adaptive element of romantic and early parent-child attachment relationships, young adults’ needs for individuation and independence suggest that normative later familial attachment may encompass higher levels of independence (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004). Therefore, attachment avoidance in this context may not be viewed as a form of insecure attachment, but merely capturing young adults’ healthy need for self-reliance.

An alternative explanation for this result could be that young adults with genuine maladaptive avoidance may be a sub-group of first year university students most in need of guidance during the transition to university. It is feasible that young adults with high levels of attachment avoidance, who are experiencing extreme distress due to difficulties associated with university transition, may seek assistance from parents if efforts at excessive self reliance have failed, though they would ordinarily not seek support from others. According to Barrera and Li (1996) young adults view parents as valuable sources of information regarding critically important issues such as academic preparation and career advice. Therefore, it is conceivable that young adults high in attachment avoidance might find themselves coping less well with difficulties than young adults low in attachment avoidance and therefore perceive greater parental support being available to them. In contrast, assistance may not be so readily rendered to young adults with low avoidance as they may be seen to cope better in the face of adversity (Cutrona, 1986) and consequently seek support less often due to “broader coping repertoires” (Ptacek, 1996, p. 510) likely to be the result of positive parenting relationships.

Whereas perceived parental support had no effect on university adjustment, there was a significant relationship between maternal and paternal intimacy and university adjustment. Young adults high in intimacy with mothers and fathers also scored higher on adjustment to university. This finding suggests that it is not the assistance received from parents that is facilitating their adjustment to university, but rather the effects of the relationship with parents that is positively influencing adjustment. Young adult females have been found to develop closer and more empathic relationships with mothers during life transitions that mark the entry into adulthood (Frank, Avery & Laman, 1988) such as the transition to university. Furthermore, the positive adjustment to university of female students has been associated with emotional closeness to parents (Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). There has also been a finding that mutually trusting and open relationships with fathers are influential in assisting the adjustment of female students during transition to university (Wintre & Sugar, 2000). As these findings relate to females, it should be noted that participants in the present study were 91.3 % female due to the gender imbalance of the population sampled.

The present study finding that parental intimacy was found to directly impact on university adjustment is consistent with previous evidence identifying both maternal and paternal intimacy as important in young adults’ adaptive adjustment to transition and fulfillment of academic aspirations (e.g., Barrera & Li, 1996; Wintre & Sugar, 2000). For instance, Field and Lang (1995) found that adolescents most interested in school were more intimate with their mothers and that young adults aspiring to finish college or undertake post-graduate study were more intimate with their mothers and fathers than those who were uninterested in academic achievement. In particular, Field and Lang suggest that the intimacy derived out of the mother-child relationship renders it the most constant relationship in an individual’s life and it therefore affects young adults’ self perceptions, social and academic adjustment. Furthermore, fathers provide valuable assistance in terms of information and guidance in matters related to academic and career interests (Barrera & Li, 1996) and trusting, open communication between fathers and daughters has been found to positively influence the adjustment of female university students (Wintre & Sugar, 2000).

A further consideration is that a higher level of self efficacy increases a young adult’s coping skills and it is the enhanced ability to cope with the demands of university transition that results in successful adjustment (Cutrona et al, 1994). There is a distinction between social support and coping, as social support refers to interpersonal resources utilised to deal with stress, whereas coping refers to personal resources employed to deal with life stresses (Leatham & Duck, 1990). It is therefore possible that young adults with higher self efficacy, due in part to higher levels of intimacy with parents, are more skilled at coping with the adjustment to university without the need for high levels of parental support.

The results of the present study imply that intimate relationships with both mother and father are important in facilitating the successful transition to university for many young adults. It is also suggested that the quality of the relationship with parents, rather than parental support, is associated with optimal adjustment to university. This finding highlights the importance of parental relationships in the lives of young adults facing challenges involved in stressful life transitions, such as beginning university (Field & Lang, 1995) and adds to the evidence that strong feelings of closeness to parents continue to influence adjustment into adulthood (Mattanah et al, 2004).
References


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**Consistently Relating to Others: A Preliminary Study of Self-reported Instrumental and Nurturant Gender Stereotyping in Three Social Settings for Males and Females**

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**Abstract**

Previous research has consistently shown that females score higher on measures of nurturant gender stereotyped behaviour than males; and males score higher on measures of instrumental gender stereotyped behaviour than females. Typically, instrumentality and nurturance are measured in relation to general functioning and have resulted in the facility to classify respondents in terms of the fourfold classification of instrumental, nurturant, undifferentiated, and androgyneous. Previous conceptualisations of sexual stereotyping suggest that it functions in a trait-like manner. This research investigates the consistency of sex role stereotyped behaviour across three settings. The three measures of setting specific sex role stereotypes were completed by each of the 33 female (mean age = 32.79; SD = 7.06) and 16 male (mean age = 39.63; SD = 10.11) respondents. Comparison of means indicated that respondents were more likely to be instrumental at work and at home, compared with social settings and more nurturant at home compared with social and work settings. Males were consistently more instrumental than females but least so in the home setting. By comparison, female respondents were more likely to be nurturant at home, and least nurturant at work. Females were consistently more nurturant than males but least discrepant in the home setting. Results will be interpreted in reference to the operationalisation, representation, and meaning of the consistency of gender stereotypes.

**Theoretical Foundations of Sex Role Stereotyping**

In Eagly’s explanation (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000) of social role theory, stereotypic characteristics of a group are consistent with the activities expected of those occupying typical social roles within the group. Correspondingly, according to social role theory, differential roles will be derived from family and from parents who foster gender stereotypes by which each gender is expected to function (Diekman & Eagley, 2000). According to Diekman & Eagley gender stereotypes emerge from role bound activities as favoured and recurring roles become stereotypic for each sex, assisting and patterning typical activities within settings. If such social roles are flexible, then perceptions of gender stereotypes will alter to reflect changes in social roles.

There have been challenges to the prominence of social role theory as an explanation for sex role behaviour, for example the alternative explanation put by evolutionary psychologists. In summary, the argument is that a Darwinian explanation based on sexual selection provides a better explanation than the socialisation argument proffered by social role theorists (Archer, 1996). According to the Darwinian perspective, sex difference in social behaviour is based on fitness requirements related to the reproductive strategies that govern the interaction between males and females (Archer). The argument states that the contribution of women to reproductive processes is greater than that of men and women provide a greater contribution to the birth process. This combined with the limitation placed on the number of births a woman may have means that women bring a limited resource to the reproductive process. Corresponding with women’s evolutionary drive, men protect the limited resource and offspring paternally. The consequence of this, among other reactions is jealousy and aggressive protection.

The refutation of this argument was provided by Eagly, (1997) who maintained that the evolutionary argument was weak, and did not take account of the empirical support for social role theory. In the main, her conclusion was that findings demonstrating variability in sex differentiated behaviour is better explained by social role theory and those associated theories provided by social scientists than evolutionary explanations. In line with Eagly’s argument stereotypical sex role behaviour has been shown to vary as a function of roles, but in a more complex manner. This complexity is consistent with Bem’s (1981a, 1981b) initial concept of gender schema theory in which sex-typing for the individual emerges from a readiness to encode and organise information about oneself and one's culture’s definition of maleness and femaleness. The process of acquiring a gender schema is not a passive process but an interactive cognitive and social engagement. The relevance of these two theoretical explanations is important for the research being completed here. If sex role stereotypes have a strictly evolutionary origin then sex role stereotypes will be consistent across settings. By contrast, if sex role stereotypes are formed through observation and experience, then sex roles should vary in different settings.
The Consequence of Role Diversification for Women and Men

If the foundation of sex role stereotyping for the child is work modelled by parents then changes in gendered stereotypical work roles will prompt changes in the child's sex role stereotyping. Over recent generations women's labour force participation has increased but their domestic responsibilities have remained high (Hayghe, 1990). Women have moved into what have been traditionally male work roles. In doing so, according to social role theory, women have taken on more attributes of agency (instrumentality) and less communal (nurturant) attitudes and behaviours which have been explained as meeting employers' needs (Eagly & Steffen, 1984, 1986). The new attributes associated with work were explained as different to those associated with the domestic role (Eagly and Steffen, 1984, 1986). In comparison, men have maintained a high participation rate at work but have not taken up domestic responsibilities to the same extent as women have taken on non home labour force participation. Consistent with previous findings (Shelton, 1992) men have not entered previously, female-dominated occupations to the same extent that females have entered male dominated occupations (Reskin & Roos, 1990). In the Australian context 56% of women are in the labour force (women account for 73% part-time and casual workers), accounting for 45% of the overall labour force (Goward, 2005). Women are also taking up more tertiary places (50.6% of women, compared to 43.9% of men have bachelor's degrees), and are moving into professional occupations (Goward, 2005). Women bear the major responsibility for managing family life, but the majority (65.5%) of women return to work by the time their youngest child is between 10 and 14 years of age (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2005). Contrary to the female trend, instead of engaging more in family life, males are spending more time at work but have not taken a greater role in family activities (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2005). These trends in working roles have been occurring for some decades. According to social role theory such changes in the roles for females would result in modelling instrumental work related tasks and in so doing potentially altering previous sex role orientation observed by children. The result would be a constant sex role orientation of nurturance and an increase in instrumentality, in the sex role orientation for women, over time. Correspondingly, as males are retaining their work-related roles, but males are not taking up more responsibilities in the home, their instrumentality score and their nurturance scores would not alter overtime.

To date little research has investigated sex role associated with social settings. Sex role orientation in social settings have been included as they contrast the theoretically explained origins of sex role associated with work and home.

Hypothesis 1: Males will have a higher mean rating of instrumentality in comparison to females who will have higher ratings of nurturance than males, across the three settings.

Hypothesis 2: A greater discrepancy will occur between males’ mean instrumentality score for the settings of work and home in comparison with the females’ mean instrumentality score for the settings of work and home.

Consistency of Longitudinal Research

Recent research has also investigated gender roles of midlife men and women in the traditional male occupation of management over a four-year period to evaluate the consistency of sex role stereotypes (Kirchmeyer 2002). Kirchmeyer reports research that demonstrates the inconsistency of findings of longitudinal studies and concludes that gender roles changed in magnitude over the life course, in much the same way that personality modifies, while maintaining core consistencies. The findings of the mean difference across time and the correlations of scores across time generally demonstrate some evidence for constancy of gender roles, however Kirchmeyer (2002) also maintained that there was some malleability across the time period. For females, nurturance scores decreased over time, consistent with previous research (Helson & Wink, 1992) indicating support for the maturational pattern of change in sex roles for women. The corresponding change for men would be a reduction in instrumentality and an increase in nurturance, however this result has not been shown. Thus, sex role behaviour may change slowly over time but is mainly stable.

To date no research has investigated the consistency of sex role stereotypes across multiple roles. If instrumental and nurturant sex role stereotypes are consistent and function like a personality trait, albeit with some variability over time, it would be reasonable to assume that sex role stereotypes will remain consistent across various settings. The aim of the current research is to compare sex role stereotypes, for males and females, cross-sectionally.

Hypothesis 3: It is expected that the correlation of instrumentality scores for males, for the three settings of home, work, and social will be highly correlated. Correspondingly, it is expected that the correlation of nurturance scores, for females for the three settings of home, work, and social will be highly correlated.

Hypothesis 4: It is expected that there will be no mean score difference on instrumentality and nurturance scores across the three settings of home, work, and social for males or for females.
Method

Participants

Participants were 49 adults (31 females and 16 males) recruited from a convenience sample. Ages ranged from 30 to 45 years with a mean age of 32.8 (SD = 7.1) for females and 39.6 (SD = 10.1) for males. Sixty three percent of female respondents were married or partnered for an average of 5.4 years and 60% of these participants had children. Ninety four percent of male respondents were married or partnered for an average of 9.9 years and 69% of these males had children. Seventy percent of females had full-time employment outside the home, one was a full-time mother and the remainder worked part-time. Eighty one percent of males worked full-time; two working part-time, and one male was seeking work. The majority of females (57%) and males (56%) worked in managerial and professional occupations and the remainder indicated a broad range of occupational types.

Materials

Respondents were asked to respond to an adjusted version of the 60-item Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). The adjustment involved rewording the inventory to correspond to three settings. Thus, an instrumental item associated with work, “At work I Defend my own beliefs”. An example of a nurturant item from a social setting was, “In social settings I am Affectionate,” and an example of an instrumental item from a home setting is, “At home I am Independent.” Each item required a response from a seven point Likert-type scale. Items were summed in the manner recommended by previous research (Bem, 1974) providing a range of 20-140.

Procedure

The scales were counterbalanced to prevent response bias. Participants were each given an explanatory statement, and the self-report questionnaires. Questionnaires were completed in the participants’ own time and returned to the researcher.

Results

After Pearson’s Product moment correlations were calculated a series of planned repeated and between variable analyses were completed. All univariate and multivariate data were checked for normality and were satisfactory.

Descriptive data about the variables of interest are shown in table 1. To investigate the consistency of the association between home, work, and social settings for the sex role stereotypes of instrumentality and nurturance (hypothesis three) Pearson product-moment correlations were completed. It was expected that a higher, significant correlation would be present for the three settings of home, work, and social within each sex. Table 1 shows that instrumentality scores, involving male respondents (bold, underlined), were moderately correlated between home and work, and home and social settings, but not work and social settings. For nurturance scores, involving female respondents (bold, underlined), there were moderate correlations between home and social, and work and social sex role stereotype, but the home and work sex role stereotypes were only approaching significance. The range of significant correlations was .55 to .68, accounting for approximately (an average of) 39% of the shared variance. Of interest were the instrumentality correlations for two of the three settings that were significant, for females: home and social, and work and social sex role stereotypes. Similarly, the correlation involving nurturance that was significant for men associated work and social sex role stereotype.

To investigate hypothesis one, whether males will have a higher mean rating of instrumentality in comparison to females who are expected to have higher ratings of nurturance than males, in each of the three settings, three MANOVAs of 2 IVs (sex) by 2 DVs (nurturance v instrumentality) for each settings were computed. Table 1 show the differences between the groups and the correlations. Underlined figures are of greatest interest to the study. In reference to the comparison of instrumentality with nurturance by sex of respondent for the home setting, there were no significant sex effects. In comparing the instrumentality and the nurturance at work there was a significant effect for sex for instrumentality \( (F(1,47) = 11.22, p = .01, \eta^2 = .19) \) with males’ scores higher. There was no sex effect involving nurturance in the work setting. The comparison of instrumentality and nurturance by sex in social settings showed a main effect for instrumentality with male scoring higher than females in social settings \( (F(1,47) = 6.77, p = .01, \eta^2 = .13) \). Although only two of the six between sex comparisons were significant all of the non significant means were in the expected direction.
Table 1
Mean, Standard Deviation, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation for Females and Males on Instrumentality and Nurturance by Three Settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex role Setting</th>
<th>Mean Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Alpha Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home (1)</td>
<td>91.14</td>
<td>89.61</td>
<td>94.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>10.21</td>
<td>17.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work (2)</td>
<td>93.61</td>
<td>89.58</td>
<td>101.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.32</td>
<td>11.46</td>
<td>13.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social (3)</td>
<td>81.49</td>
<td>77.53</td>
<td>89.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.26</td>
<td>14.31</td>
<td>17.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home (4)</td>
<td>92.61</td>
<td>92.88</td>
<td>92.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.84</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>7.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work (5)</td>
<td>86.94</td>
<td>89.09</td>
<td>82.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.29</td>
<td>12.79</td>
<td>10.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social (6)</td>
<td>91.14</td>
<td>90.51</td>
<td>85.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>12.30</td>
<td>9.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Above the diagonal are coefficients for females; below the diagonal are coefficients for males; * p < .05; ** p < .01. Mean scores sharing the same alphabetic letter are significantly different.

To investigate hypothesis two, whether a greater discrepancy will occur between males’ mean instrumentality score for the settings of work and home in comparison with the females’ mean instrumentality score for the settings of work and home, values for settings of work were subtracted from the values of home and negative coefficients were multiplied by –1, generating a positive difference value. A t-test of 2 IVs (sex) by the difference score between work and home was completed. Results showed that there was no significant difference between males (mean discrepancy = 11.50) and females (mean discrepancy = 11.12) on the discrepancy between instrumentality in work and home settings \((t(47) = -.116, p = .908)\).

To test the difference in instrumentality between settings (hypothesis four) a multivariate, repeated measures comparison (setting: home, work, and social) for the DVs (nurturance and instrumentality) for males was completed (Figure 1). The same analysis of sex roles was then completed for females. For males’ instrumentality scores there was a quadratic effect \(F(1,15) = 8.29, p = .011, \eta^2 = .36\). Pairwise analysis of the variables showed that there was a difference between males’ instrumental home and work setting scores \((t(15) = -2.28, p = .05; \eta^2 = .26)\) and a difference between work and social settings \((t(15) = 5.82, p = .001; \eta^2 = .35)\) but no difference between home and social settings. For males’ nurturant scores there was a quadratic effect \(F(1,15) = 5.71, p = .03, \eta^2 = .28\) with a significant effect between home and work settings \((t(15) = 2.68, p = .017; \eta^2 = .26)\) but no difference between home and social, and work and social settings. The repeated measures analysis of the three settings of females’ instrumentality scores of nurturance showed there was no difference across setting. The analysis of the three settings of females’ instrumentality scores showed a quadratic effect \(F(1,32) = 9.29, p = .005, \eta^2 = .23\). Subsequent analyses indicated a significant difference between instrumentality scores for females at home and socially \((t(32) = 5.05, p = .001; \eta^2 = .44)\) and at work and socially \((t(32) = 5.18, p = .001; \eta^2 = .46)\).
The findings from this research partially support the argument that sex-role is consistent across settings as it has been found to be consistent across time. The hypotheses that were analysed will be discussed in detail, below.

For hypothesis three, the consistency of the correlations between the three settings for males and females, and their corresponding sex role stereotype, was poor to moderate. For males, there was no significant association between work and social sex role stereotypes. For females, there was no significant association between the sex role stereotypes of home and work. Those sex role stereotypes that were significant were moderate at best. This draws into question the nature of the stability of sex role stereotypes and makes more complex, the simple explanation provided by the previous findings confirming that sex-role may be malleable over time. (Kirchmeyer 2002). Interesting correlations of males’ nurturance scores at work and socially, and females instrumentality sex role stereotypes of home with social and work roles were found.

In reference to hypothesis one that the difference between males’ instrumentality scores in comparison with females’ nurturance scores, in the three settings, showed an absence of effect at home. The peak for instrumentality score for males was at work and the low score for instrumentality for females was in the social setting. This is in contrast with the argument of (Diekman & Eagley, 2000) who stated that instrumental sex role has its origins in sex role related work. The score for male instrumentality being higher at work was consistent with expectations based on social role theory over evolutionary theory (Archer, 1996). Similarly, the diversification of females into previously male domains of work may result in females not associating as much with traditionally nurturant roles at home, manifest here in an absence of elevated scores for nurturance, for women at home. This finding partially draws into question the consistency of sex role, over time (Kirchmeyer 2002) but may support the maturational pattern explanation argued by Helson & Wink (1992).

Hypothesis four was based on the previous findings indicating consistency but malleability across time (Helson & Wink, 1992; Kirchmeyer, 2002) with the expectation that there ought therefore be some variability across settings cross-sectionally. The findings that there were more significant differences than consistency indicated that the relationship between sex and sex role stereotype is more complex than previously conceived. In summary, the nurturant scores of females did not vary between settings. Instrumentality scores for females were lowest for the social setting. Instrumentality scores for males were highest at work. Nurturant scores for males were highest at home. Importantly, the smallest discrepancy between the sex roles by sex was apparent in the home setting. A tentative conclusion may be that sex role stereotypes are only expressed in settings wherein they are socially relevant or socially facilitative. In a setting such as home, sex role stereotypes give way to caring functionality, a combination of both nurturance and instrumentality.
In consideration of the implications of this research it is noteworthy that the conceptualisation of sex role stereotypes in multiple roles generates a special case of representation, as shown in figure 2. This figure shows the six coefficients paired by settings for two females represented against the cutpoints (vertical and horizontal lines) as defined by Brown, Icke, & Linker (1990). Case one shows an androgynous home, a more nurturant social, and relatively undifferentiated work sex role stereotype. By contrast, case two shows a very undifferentiated social, and to a lesser degree undifferentiated work sex role, with a slightly more instrumental home sex role stereotype.

The interpretation of a diffusion or convergence in the combination of sex roles across settings, and the area of space between the three settings of sex-roles remains largely unexplored. This representation has relevance for social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). It is also possible that it is relevant for other clinical and therapeutic applications associated with the definition and function of personality. The issues associated with this representation is, firstly its relevance. That is, does it have any application? If so can a single or efficient coding system be constructed to represent two sex roles in three different settings. Other issues such as the area enclosed by the triangle are worthy of further investigation. Further investigation into the relationship between the expression of sex roles in settings and their statistical representation is worthwhile. Finally, exploring, when reconfiguration of the six coefficients is healthy, unhealthy, or clinically problematic, would be worthwhile.

![Figure 2](image_url)

Figure 2. Two examples of nurturance and instrumentality of sex role stereotypes in three salient settings.
Finally, there are limitations to this research. This research was based on a very small sample, bringing into question any generalisation of conclusions. The conceptualisation, methodology and analysis used in this research were novel, other ways of representing and analysing similar material would be advantageous. Future research will clarify these issues.

References


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The Who, What, Where, and When of Intimacy: A Study of the Experience of Intimate Communication

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Abstract

Various authors have written definitively about the aspects of intimacy in our lives, however, theoretical definitions of intimacy would suggest that it is a ‘fuzzy’ concept better characterised as a shifting template of features that vary depending on the context. Despite this expected variability, little research has attempted to phenomenologically describe the experience of intimacy. In this research 130 females (mean age: 36.41; SD: 17.82) and 97 males (mean age: 38.02, SD: 17.74) from a range of cohabiting relationships, completed the questionnaire describing their experience of intimacy on the previous day. Results showed that intimacy was experienced mostly with friends, then partners/spouses. The intimate communication ranged from one to 720 minutes, with a mode of 60 minutes. The intimacy occurred most frequently in the home of the respondent, involving talking and discussing, and for the majority did not involve physical contact (62%). Among the most frequent subjects discussed were the relationship between the two conversants, their relationships with their partners, and family members. The intimate communication was perceived as mostly good and relaxed. The discussion will address the apparent discrepancy between representations of intimacy and the phenomenological experience described.

There has been a range of empirical and discursive writings about intimacy. Typically, such writing has conflated intimacy with other positive relating behaviours and emotions such as, love and affection. Further, popular literature such as Gray (1993) has emphasised the difference between men and women when they communicate intimately, and Schnarch (1998) has emphasised the passionate aspects of intimacy. Both of these texts imply in their subtext that people are dissatisfied with, and in need of, a new means of experiencing intimacy and that doing so will improve their relationship and their lives in general. Such a didactic approach comes at the expense of, and ignores the qualities of, a broader conception of the common experience of intimacy. The aim of this research is to reconsider the conceptualisation of intimacy and investigate whether a broader conceptualisation and definition of the phenomenon of intimacy will emerge from a quasi-grounded theory investigation.

Definition of Intimacy

Previously, intimacy has been defined as a very general construct, “an intimate relationship is one in which neither party silences, sacrifices, or betrays the self, and each party expresses strength and vulnerability, weakness and competence in a balanced way.” (Lerner, 1989; p. 3). Another definition provides a different focus as “intimacy refers to the feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 315). Intimacy is also considered a multidimensional concept with four elements (Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, & Gridley, 2003): love and affection (Prager 1999), personal validation (Berscheid, 1985), trust (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993), and self-disclosure (Hatfield & Rapson). This definition of intimacy is problematic, as it conflates intimacy with love and affection. Further, one could argue that the definition of love, contains the elements of intimacy and affection. I would contend that love and affection are two separate components of relating and the conflation of these two concepts into intimacy is problematic. Following this contention it is important to carefully separate the ways of relating and consider them independently rather than continue to confuse concepts. In this paper the first aim is to provide an in-depth investigation of the particular experience of intimacy.

Sex Differences

The popular psychology literature presents strong arguments that there are differences between the way that men and women communicate in relationships (for example, Gray, 1992). Sex differences have been a consistent feature of research into adolescents and young adult explanations of intimacy and sexual behaviour (McCabe, 2005). In the 1970s and 1980s the evidence suggested that males wanted greater sexual involvement, while both males and females wanted similar levels of affection, understanding, and commitment (McCabe, 2005). The evidence showed that males varied in their attitude to sex, but the sexual experience of males and females were similar. McCabe maintained that while varying across cultures, age, and relationship strength, there were stronger similarities between adolescent males and females in the emphasis placed on both intimacy and sex within relationships. In adult research women have scored higher than men in ratings of love, affection, and personal validation (Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, & Gridley, 2003). Closer scrutiny of the effect sizes of these scores indicated that only a very small amount of the variance was accounted for by sex differences. To date
little research has systematically shown sex differences in the intimate behaviours and emotions of adults, contrary to the explanations and arguments provided in popular psychology literature (Gray, 1993). In this paper, the second aim is to investigate sex effects in descriptions of the elements of intimacy.

Theoretical and Methodological Approach

Much of the previous research has involved questionnaires and theoretically based items and there is an absence of research investigating the context of intimate interactions (Prager, 2000). There has been little research into the conception of intimacy from the respondent's perspective. This research, attempts to redress this absence, by asking respondents about intimacy in a more complex manner following the recommendations of a grounded approach (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002). In this research, an emphasis on the first of the four techniques outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) that emphasises basic questioning (i.e., who, when, why, where, what, how, how much, how frequent, what duration, rate, and timing) will be completed in an attempt to better define intimacy from the respondents' perspective. To provide an in-depth investigation of intimacy in this research, questions relating to the participants, timing, context, environment, and the content of the intimacy will be requested of respondents.

Method

Participants

Participants were 130 females (mean age = 36.04, SD = 17.82) and 97 males (mean age = 38.02, SD = 17.74) from metropolitan Melbourne, Australia. Forty-five percent were married or cohabiting; 44% were single, 14% were divorced, and 11% were widowed. There was no significant difference in marital status by sex ($\chi^2 (4, N=227) = 6.42, p=0.17$). Forty-three percent of respondents were parents. Forty-four percent of respondents had university and 11% had TAFE qualifications with the remainder having secondary school qualifications. Thirty percent had professional careers, 23% of participants were tertiary students; 8% were managers and 9% were tradespeople. Nine percent were involved in clerical and the remainder had service and other occupations. Seventy percent were of Australian-Anglo origin, 11% were of European background, 6% were of Asian background, and 5% were from England. Seventeen respondents (7.5%) indicated that they did not have any intimate communication yesterday and therefore were unable to answer questions two to nine.

Measure

As part of a large battery of questionnaires related to relationships one page was included that asked respondents to recall the experience of intimate communication that they had yesterday. Respondents were asked to indicate:
1. The total amount of time, they spent, interacting with a person, where they felt free to talk about and discuss things that they wouldn’t want any other person to know you were speaking about? __________ mins.;
2. The relationship that they have with the person with whom they shared the intimate communication;
3. How long had they known the other person;
4. Whether the intimate communication involved physical contact;
5. Where the intimate communication took place;
6. How intense was the intimate communication (very intense, intense, somewhat intense, and not intense at all);
7. The subject of the intimate communication;
8. What happened during the intimate communication;
9. How they felt during the intimate communication.

Procedure

Participants were invited to take part in the research as part of a larger project related to relationships and attachment. Questionnaires were completed at a time convenient to the participants and were forwarded back through the students (see endnote) who assisted in data gathering. Where appropriate responses were allocated into more general categories in line with grounded theory (Norton & Fowler, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Results

The mean amount of time spent in intimate communication was 64 minutes ($SD = 100.93$) and ranged from 0 to 720 minutes. The median was 30 and the mode was 60 minutes. Data was skewed, so a parametric test was not appropriate. To assess the sex difference the data was converted into quartiles and a crosstabulation analysis was performed (Figure 1). When skewed data was encountered in subsequent research the same procedure was completed.
The results showed that there was no sex effect ($\chi^2(3, N = 227) = 3.76, p = .289$) indicating that the amount of time spent in intimate communication yesterday was the same for males and females.

The partners in the intimate communication were categorized into four groups: family member, partner, friend, and boy or girlfriend (Figure 2). The largest group of participants in the communication were family members followed by partners, friend, and boy or girlfriend. The results showed that there was no sex effect ($\chi^2(3, N = 210) = 2.28, p = .515$) meaning that males and females did not differentiate in their relationship partner in intimate communication yesterday.

The length of time that the person with whom the intimate communication took place varied widely from two weeks to 58 years with a mean of 10.50 ($SD = 12.13$), median of 5.00 years and mode of 2.00 years. The quartile with the longest relationships averaged approximately 28.40 years (Figure 3). There was no difference between males and females in the length of their relationship with their confidante ($\chi^2(3, N = 210) = 1.98, p = .576$). This provides evidence that intimacy is not associated with the sex of the partners and that intimate relationships are likely to be long term.

* % of $n$ denotes percentage of males and percentage of females.
Respondents indicated that physical contact \((n = 37.8\%);\) Figure 4) was more unlikely than likely to occur \((n = 62.4\%);\) in intimate communication. The crosstabulation of type of contact by sex of respondent showed that there was no significant difference \((\chi^2 (1, N = 210) = 1.40, p = .237).\)
Figure 5. Where the intimate communication took place.

Respondents also indicated how intense the intimate communication was by marking a four level scale ranging from ‘very intense’ to ‘not intense at all’ with the most frequent response being ‘somewhat intense’ (Figure 6). The modal frequent was for the category of somewhat intense. The chi-square analysis indicated that the frequency of selection of intensity category by sex of respondent showed that the experience of intimacy was not significant ($\chi^2 (3, N = 210) = 3.85, p = .278$). This indicates that males and females reported similar levels of intensity during the intimate experience.

Figure 6. How intense the intimate communication was for males and females.

The topic of the intimate communication varied considerably. Forty-five specific categories were collapsed into seven general categories. The seven categories consisted of one's own relationship, family, other relationships, feelings, life issues, work and action, and other (Figure 7). To test whether there was a sex effect associated with these seven factors a crosstabulation was completed. The chi-square analysis indicated that the relationship between the subject of communication and sex of respondent approached significance ($\chi^2 (6, N = 210) = 12.28, p = .056 \eta = 0.08$). The largest category of responses was one's life issues (23.5%), followed by one’s own relationship (21%), other relationships (16%), family (13.5%), work and action (13%), feelings (10%), and other (3%).
The description of what happened during the intimate communication was defined by 23 categories of responses. The categories were reduced to five general categories of responses of talking, discussing, physical contact, negative experiences and positive experiences (Figure 8). Talking (43%) and Discussing (33%) were derived from categories specifically noting those terms. Physical contact was characterized by hugging, sex (having sex), kisses, and making love and accounted for 10% of responses. Negative experience (10%) was defined by nothing, crying, none, conflict, and confusion. Positive experience (4%) was contributed to by eating food, shared feelings, drank wine/beer, and established trust. Physical contact has been described fully to demonstrate that it accounts for a relatively small proportion of the activity of intimate communication. Crosstabulation of the five sets of activities by sex showed that there was no sex effect ($\chi^2$ (4, $N = 210$) = 1.51, $p = .825$).

The feelings experienced by the respondents during the intimate communication generated 44 categories of responses that were reduced to the fourfold circumplex model of emotion (Russell, 1997). The factors of the model are elation, calm, depression, and distress. Elation represents categories such as, good, happy, and positive. Calm represents categories of relaxed, love, fine, and at ease. Depression represents categories of sad, depressed, not getting anywhere, and guilty. Distress represents categories of angry, frustrated, angry, and tense. The emotions of elation (38%) were most experienced during the intimate communication followed by calm (26%), distress (23%), and least categorized were the depression (13%) related feelings. Crosstabulation of the four sets of emotions by sex showed that there was no sex effect ($\chi^2$ (3, $N = 210$) = 3.76, $p = .289$).
In summary, the time taken to communicate intimately varied widely and might be considered a time consuming activity for some people. Mostly, family members and friends shared the intimate communications. Respondents were intimate with people that they had known from as little as two weeks to decades. The intimate communication typically took place at home. The reported intensity of the intimate communication varied but was mainly somewhat intense. The subject of the intimate communication was mostly about life issues, the respondent’s own relationships, and other relationships. The feelings associated with intimate communication were mainly positive and related to elation and calm feeling (63.90%) compared with negative feelings associated distress and depression (36.10%).

Question 4) asked, whether the intimate communication involved physical contact, and question 7) asked what was the subject of the intimate communication? In response to question 4 respondents indicated that the intimate communication was likely to involve physical contact in 38% of communications. In response to question 7, respondents indicated that intimate communication was more likely to involve speaking in 77% of cases in comparison with physical contact (9%). The categories defining speaking involved talking (n = 78) and discussing (n = 58), whereas physical contact was characterized by hugging (n = 7), sex (having sex) (n = 5), kisses (n = 2), and making love (n = 3). The discrepancy between these two responses is difficult to reconcile other than to suggest that the difference in the questions prompted different levels of specificity in the recollection of the intimate communication.

Importantly, there was little evidence to support the proposition that men and women vary in their experience of intimate communication as argued by (Gray, 1993). This is in line with the adolescent research conducted by McCabe (2005). The large majority of respondents had expressed themselves intimately the day before the survey and a large number had done so for a considerable amount of time. Further, the experience was associated with positive feelings, in the large majority of cases. This would suggest that the majority of this cohort readily express themselves through intimate communication. Further, they did not identify passion as a component of the experience as suggested by Schnarck (1998). Taken together, it is worth considering that elements of the popular psychology press may be misrepresenting the centrality of passion and the difference between males and females.

The findings are phenomenologically relevant in that, in line with Prager’s (2000) recommendation, they show the importance and variety of context factors in intimate interaction. The findings have shown that 92.5% of respondents surveyed had been involved in over an average of an hour's intimate communication, as recently as yesterday. The findings are also practically relevant to those working with individuals and couples on intimacy issues. Developing with clients an understanding of the context, content, and experience of intimacy is important. Finally, the findings are empirically relevant, as they correct misconceptions about intimacy and demonstrate that intimacy is a more commonplace experience than has been previously described.

There are limitations to this research. Firstly, the respondents were drawn from a sample of convenience and are not representative, therefore, generalising from these data is problematic. This research was, in line with Prager, (2000), about intimate communication and care must be taken not to confuse intimate communication and the circumstances about intimate communication with intimacy per se. Finally, the higher-order categories into which the data have been sorted have not been validated and further research is necessary to do so.

Future research into the context and experience of intimate communication and intimacy per se, would validate this research and advance understanding in this area.
References


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Do Women Directors Have to Join the Boys Club?

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Abstract

Can women board directors be different from male directors or do they need to display male characteristics to be accepted? Leadership can be seen as based on the process of influence between one person and a group of other people. It is argued that displaying salient masculine characteristics within a board enables women directors to win the support of male directors on the board. Behaving in ways seen as consistent with the position, would allow them to effectively influence board decisions. This research examines the occupational stereotypes held by board directors in Australia. There were 32 women directors in the sample who held positions on company boards in Australia since 1995. Gender-based occupational categorization theory was used as a conceptual framework in the research to assist in understanding the different social positions held by men and women. An occupational stereotype scale was used to identify stereotypes held by women and male female directors. The results indicated that a particular occupational stereotype of women directors is held by women board members. The stereotype held is more consistent with masculine characteristic than consistent with feminine characteristics. The implications for in-group membership of the Board are discussed, as are the issues for women seeking Board appointments.

In academic literature and in popular press it is often claimed that to be successful women must be as similar as possible to their male colleagues, especially their senior male colleagues (Westphal & Milton, 2000). While Turner (1991) argued that a leader is the person within the group who is able to exercise the most influence in a particular instance, Haslam (2001) preferred to talk about leadership as an interactive process. He claimed that leadership success was partially determined by the perception others hold of the person as a leader. Such perceptions were based on stereotypes of how those who provide leadership behave. Such pre-existing stereotypes create expectations, of behaviour and traits, related to the person occupying the position of leader (Haslam 2001). While their number in Australia may be small, women directors have been able to win places on boards of directors, and many, retain those positions over an extended period. It is argued that through displaying leadership characteristics, maintaining influence and credibility, and through ongoing displays of those attributes associated with commonly held stereotypes, women directors can be successful in board positions.

A board of directors can be considered a salient group, allowing social identity theory to provide a useful conceptual framework for research in this area. The perception of shared characteristics within such a group has been shown to have implications for the ways in which the group is perceived especially by those who are not within the in-group. Social psychological research in the area of social identity, (Hogg 2000) reported that homogeneous high status work groups strengthen in-group prototypes, and the perceived social attractiveness of the group. The shared understandings of social relations lead to different strategies for self-enhancement, such as shared language, rituals, meeting protocols, and other habits that serve to reinforce group membership and a sense of shared status and belonging. Others marginal or outside the group may find the idea of group membership attractive and feel diminished due to exclusion. Hence, the more that an individual shares similar characteristics to a work group; the more likely they will be seen as being part of the in-group. Similarly, a person in the group who does not have shared characteristics with the majority is likely to be perceived in terms of their minority status and, as such, be subject to negative stereotyped expectations and treatment from the dominant group.

Gender is one of the most obvious defining characteristics. Hogg (2000) argued that when female gender is synonymous with minority status, women will be subject to negative stereotypical expectations and treatment from men. Stereotypical treatment is particularly likely, if the woman’s employment position is in a gender typed occupation (Hogg).

However, stereotypes can be changed by factors that increase the awareness of a shared social identity by a group of perceivers and awareness of their shared characteristics (Bar-Tal 1998). For women directors the challenge would be to project, and to have the men board members perceive, characteristics that focus on shared values, behaviour, skills, and aptitudes, rather than on their minority gender status as women. Burke (1997) reported that women appointed to boards are typically, qualified and experienced, for that role. As such, they have credibility for their contributions. Peterson, Owens, Tetlock, Fan, and Martorana (1998) reported that decision making groups that were successful had leaders who expressed their views clearly, early on in the discussion, and actively sought to persuade other group members towards their position. Clearly to be successful, women board members, as do men board members, must display a range of attributes and skills that contribute to competent decision making.
According to social identity theory, leadership will be defined differently from task group to task group, and depends on the group’s needs at the time. The characteristics identified in the items used in the present research, allow participants to identify those characteristics that they assess as being most relevant for a board of directors. In a scale to assess stereotypes developed by Cejka and Eagly (1999) the items for the masculine personality and cognitive characteristics are closely allied with the task component of group leadership functioning. The feminine personality and cognitive characteristics are consistent with the socio-emotional functions of leadership in a group.

Cejka and Eagly (1999) explored the relationship between occupational stereotyping and social role theory. They attributed the sex segregation of occupations to the social roles assigned to men and women. They found that men were more frequently found in occupations considered consistent with the agentic personality characteristics (for example, analytical, reasoning, and problem solving), whereas women were more likely to be found in occupations consistent with communal personality characteristics, (for example, imagination, intuition, perception, verbal skillfulness, and creativity).

The proposition that exposure and experience changes stereotypes is supported by Eagly and Karau (1991). They analysed the results of 58 studies of gender and leadership behaviour in small groups. A small to moderate tendency, for men to emerge as leaders, compared to women, was found. Eagly and Karau concluded that men and women were perceived differently, and therefore behaved differently, with men’s leadership decreasing for tasks involving complex social interactions. They also reported that there was a decreased tendency, for men to emerge as leaders, as the duration and frequency of interaction increased. The explanation for the finding by the researchers was that there was a possible weakening of the gender based leadership stereotype. Given that board members meet monthly and also meet as part of board sub committees, it is likely that such regular meetings, as well as working together to solve problems, would have the effect of undermining any gender related stereotyping. A weakening of the stereotype, may reflect the lessening of gender, as a salient characteristic, as the amount of information group members have about each other increases with time.

The above explanation is consistent with the research on women directors by Burke (1994a) who reported that those men CEOs, who had worked with a woman board member on the board, were more positive about women’s contribution to the board. Burke found that those women that were part of a predominantly male board demonstrated the effect of experience and exposure, influencing the attitudes of men Chief Executive Officers. As women become in-group members, common concerns and interests outweighed a focus on gender, thus there was a weakening of stereotyped ideas.

Further evidence that gender stereotypes are not static, was provided by Diekman and Eagly (2000). They found that perceptions of women were changing and dynamic whereas perceptions of men were comparatively stable. Men and women were perceived as converging strongly in their masculine personality characteristics, and also to some extent, in their masculine cognitive, physical and feminine personality characteristics. The explanation by these researchers was that the change was an outcome of women moving into occupations that were more associated with male personality characteristics. There were also positive stereotypes of women directors such as reported by Burke (2000). He reported a CEO commenting that “women directors have been part of well run companies for many years. Women are selected based on the same criteria as the men, and are expected to perform the same functions as men, that is, they are supposed to protect the interests of the shareholders” Burke (2000, p. 184).

The present paper challenges the notion of company director being a male gendered occupation. It examined the occupational stereotyping of women who are minority members of company boards in Australia during the period 1995-2000. For the sample of directors herein, it is argued, that they will have an inclusive view of the characteristics associated with their role as director. Presumably their views are based on interaction and social contact with other directors as colleagues.

Bradshaw and Wicks (2000) described the work tasks of a board of directors as being, decision making on a range of matters concerned with company performance and managing shareholder interests. As such it is presented as a highly cognitive set of tasks. If part of leadership is to manage structure and process as described by Slater (1957) there is further support for board activities as being strongly related to cognitive skills. Therefore, it is argued, that cognitive characteristics would be a salient feature of both the activities of board directors and, the stereotype of board directors. Having shared cognitive skills and attributes would also be an indicator of their ability to work together effectively as directors. The perceived similarity of thinking or cognitive characteristics is likely to be regarded as vital to acceptance as a board director. Therefore, it is likely that idealised stereotypes of acceptable (in-group) board director cognitive characteristics will be identified.

In the present study, it is argued, that women need to demonstrate leadership amongst a group of directors which are mostly men. For women directors to demonstrate leadership it is important that they are perceived as sharing characteristics with the other directors on the board. It is expected that they would share some of the same personality attributes with male directors which would allow for ease of social interaction, but physical attributes would be of less relevance. It is unlikely that a strong stereotype of physical attributes would be held by directors. Arising from the ideas on stereotypes outlined, the following hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1 proposes that women directors will hold similar stereotypes for both men and women directors with regard to cognitive attributes;
Hypothesis 2 proposes that women directors will hold different stereotypes for both men and women directors with regard to personality attributes;

Hypothesis 3 proposes that women directors will hold different stereotypes for men and women directors with regard to masculine and feminine physical attributes.

**Method**

The sample consisted of 32 women who had been company directors on Australian company boards for the preceding 6 years. The survey instrument was an occupational stereotype scale designed by Cejka and Eagley (1999). It was used to assess the stereotypes held by women directors about women and men directors. The survey scale consisted of 56 attributes each assessed by a 5-point Likert scale. The Cejka and Eagley scale grouped the attributes into six dimensions. The dimensions were masculine physical, feminine physical, masculine cognitive, feminine cognitive, masculine personality and feminine personality.

In the present research women directors were asked to perform two rankings. The first ranking was on the likelihood that an average women director in Australia would possess each attribute. The second ranking was on the likelihood that a male director would possess each attribute. The reliability of the Cejka and Eagley (1999) scale was based on a validation study in which 144 psychology students were surveyed. Reliability is demonstrated through the calculation of alpha coefficients with all alpha coefficients being over .80. For the present sample alpha coefficients were similarly satisfactory the lowest being .79 for feminine personality and a .93 for each set of attributes related to masculine physical and feminine personality characteristics.

In comparing the responses from the women directors on the stereotyped attributes associated with women directors, and attributes associated with men directors the two sets of responses were considered as a paired sample, therefore, the means for each category of attributes was compared.

**Results**

The results of the comparison of means for the sample were shown in Figure 1. The first hypothesis proposed that women directors would hold similar stereotypes for both men and women directors with regard to cognitive attributes. Hypothesis 1 was supported. There was no significant difference found in the cognitive attributes associated with men or women directors. Women directors were perceived as being similar to men directors on the following attributes: analytical, exact, good at abstractions, good at problem solving, good at reasoning, good with numbers, mathematical, and quantitatively skilled.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that women directors would hold different stereotypes for both men and women directors with regard to personality attributes. Hypothesis 2 was supported, with men directors being seen as more aggressive, competitive, courageous, and dominant than women directors. Women directors were attributed the feminine personality attributes of affectionate, cooperative, forgiving, gentle, helpful to others, kind, nurturing, outgoing, sensitive, sentimental, supportive, sympathetic, understanding of others and warm in relation to others. In an examination of the individual attributes over half the personality attributes were allocated in the expected direction by the sample.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that women directors will hold different stereotypes for men and women directors with regard to masculine and feminine physical attributes. Women and men respondents did in fact differ on their stereotype of attributes of physical appearance. As would be expected women directors were considered to display more feminine attributes than men directors. Women directors were attributed with characteristics such as beautiful, dainty, petite, pretty, sexy, and softly spoken. Men directors on the other hand were attributed characteristics such as brawny, burly, muscular, physically strong, rugged and tall.
Overall, 14 of the 25 attributes that were significant provided support for the argument that women directors saw themselves as similar to men directors on cognitive skill, and on perceived personality attributes but not similar on physical attributes Therefore, it is concluded that there are stereotyped attributes for both women and men directors with masculine cognitive skills as set of key attributes of women directors who have successfully accessed “the boys club”.

**Discussion**

Directors of boards are typically male. It would be expected therefore that the male oriented characteristics would be perceived as necessary for occupational success. Male board directors, who have worked alongside a woman as a boardroom colleague, may understand that women are capable of agentic behaviour. Other men directors who had not had a similar experience would be likely to associate such behaviours only with other men. Like other in-groups, as described by Hogg (2000), stereotyped notions will be held unless experience has clearly demonstrated the attributions are inaccurate and inadequate.

Overall women directors in the present sample agreed in their perceptions of a stereotypical woman and man director. Given that men can be seen to be to be the “in-group” by shear dint of their numbers on company boards, that females generally do not differentiate but the stereotype of male and female directors suggests that masculine cognitive characteristics would be important to display as one means for women to demonstrate similarity. Previous research has supported that women do gain in-group status is supported by previous research (Burke 1994b), as well as the evidence provided by previous research that minorities can gain in-group status (Haslam 2001, Hogg 2000). Previous research has also found that men directors are more aware of women’s contribution and board behaviour (probably related to cognitive attributes) than other attributes of personality (Bradshaw, Murray & Wolpin 1992).

Previous research has found that perceived demographic similarity can be a very important positive influence on work team formation (Jackson, Stone & Alvarez 1992). Tsui, Egan, and O’Rielley (1992) found that people favour those that they perceive to be similar to themselves, and that perceived demographic similarity can be the basis of in-group membership. Being part of the “in club” has also been found to enhance both self-esteem and identity of directors. In the present study it may be that shared goals and purposes have become a form of similarity which bonds the board together. A shared purpose creates a club but one that women have joined successfully through demonstrating shared/equal cognitive attributes.

Women directors hold positions in a highly gender segregated occupational group. Women directors, it can be argued, are in a gender incongruent occupation yet notions of a stereotype may have mellowed through experience. The results of the present study present an optimistic picture of women’s ability to join the boys club. It may be that women directors are able to manage perceptions to facilitate a perception of homogeneity to develop which allows them into the boys club. The key conclusion is that through displaying behaviours associated with the masculine cognitive dimension women can overcome gender differences. Empirical evidence
such as the examination of stereotypes presented is a new aspect of the research on women board directors and provides a link between research on women directors and social identity theory.

References


Relationship Satisfaction: Towards an Integrated Model

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Abstract

Much research into relationship satisfaction has focused on comparing satisfied and unsatisfied couples rather than identifying the components of relationship satisfaction. In this study we tested a model of relationship satisfaction that includes: emotional intelligence, attachment style, differentiation of self, adaptive loving, and family status factors. One hundred and forty-seven volunteers (65% women) (M age 42.30 years, SD = 13.02 years) participated in the study. Overall, adaptive loving emerged as the variable which contributed most to relationship satisfaction followed by differentiation of self. Emotional intelligence and a secure attachment style also contributed to relationship satisfaction, but indirectly through differentiation of self and adaptive loving. Family status factors did not effect relationship satisfaction. These findings contribute to our theoretical understanding of relationship satisfaction and inform strategies for relationship counselling and psychotherapy.

Relationship satisfaction is perhaps one of the most salient contributors to one’s sense of happiness and wellbeing and it is by far the most studied aspect of intimate relationships. While a great deal of the research into relationship satisfaction has been concerned with comparing satisfied and unsatisfied couples with the aim of predicting divorce (Parker, 2001) less work has focused on attempting to understand the interactions of factors that might contribute to relationship satisfaction. Surely the question is not how to create marriages that endure in terms of longevity alone, because an enduring marriage is not necessarily a satisfying marriage (Feeney & Noller, 1996), but rather to understand the interacting factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction and mutual happiness. In this paper we test a model of relationship satisfaction which includes familial and dispositional factors.

The high rate of divorce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002) suggests that many couples inadvertently arrive at stages in their relationships where they become lost and distressed in the complexity of balancing two people’s desires, emotions and stresses of living. Often couples feel unclear about the reasons for their distress and unable to find a way back to a more satisfying relationship path (Schnarch, 1997). Even starting again with a new partner does not necessarily lead to greater relationship satisfaction, as second and third marriages have progressively higher chances statistically of ending in divorce than first marriages (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002).

The considerable emotional and financial costs associated with the breakdown of families due to the couple’s distress have led researchers (e.g., Parker, 2001) to question which qualities enable couples to successfully navigate relationship challenges. Love is often the first variable that comes to mind in considering what is important in couple relating (Schnarch, 1997), and few would dispute the importance of love in couple relationships, yet even couples whose relationships are abusive can continue to profess love for one another (Schnarch, 1997). Clearly, to say “I love” is not enough to ensure a satisfying and abuse-free relationship rather the loving needs to be adaptive and considerate of the other. Fromm’s (1957) work identified personal qualities in the individual, such as the ability to recognise that loving is more concerned with giving than receiving, as vital to adaptive loving. Yet some individuals are more aware or engaged in this process than others.

In order for us to be able to love selflessly Schnarch (1997) suggested we need to have a self that is differentiated from our family of origin. This concept, originally proposed by Bowen (1978), is a psychologically mature state, which allows individuals to develop the emotional awareness and understanding to step outside any limiting roles and patterns learned in the family of origin. If left unresolved, such limiting or even negative patterns may continue to effect intimate relationships throughout adult life (Bowen, 1978). In order to undertake a personal process of differentiation of self an individual requires some curiosity and courage to explore the emotional dynamics of their family of origin and the self-trust to change their behaviour where desired to reflect their mature emotional awareness (Bowen, 1966). Such qualities loosely reflect a description of the construct of emotional intelligence, although research has not explored links between differentiation of self, emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction to date.

The hypothesis that emotional intelligence may be a contributor to relationship satisfaction has been suggested by a number of theorists (Fitness, 2001; Schutte et al., 2001), and examined with some positive preliminary results. Emotional intelligence has been defined as "...the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to

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understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to reflectively regulate emotions in ways that promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10). Using this definition, Schutte et al. (2001) observed that emotional intelligence was likely to be an influential variable in individuals’ ability to engage in adaptive and satisfying close relationships. Despite this observation, emotional intelligence does not appear in any comprehensive model of relationship satisfaction.

One contributor to relationship satisfaction which has been explored extensively (e.g., Feeney, 1995; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Meyers, 1998; Mikulincer, 1997) is the attachment style of partners. Considerable evidence has been accumulated to indicate that a secure attachment style, that is a schema of self as worthy of loving and of intimate others as basically trustworthy to provide such loving, is related to relationship satisfaction (Feeney & Noller, 1990). These schemas of the self and others formed from early experiences are thought to influence relationships with others across the lifespan (Bowby, 1969). It is likely that there would be links between attachment styles and other variables argued to contribute to relationship satisfaction, such as adaptive loving, emotional intelligence and differentiation of self.

Finally, family status, that is whether a couple have children and how long they have been in their couple relationship, are variables which have been correlated with relationship satisfaction, but remain controversial. For example, some research has found that having children is inversely correlated with couple relationship satisfaction (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982), whereas other findings have suggested that having children in a household is positively correlated with couple satisfaction (Shapiro, Gottman & Carrere, 2000). Such controversial findings require further investigation.

The aim in this paper is to examine a path model of relationship satisfaction based on qualities of the self, specifically, emotional intelligence; differentiation of self; attachment style; and love, and family status variables, namely length of relationship and presence of children in the home (see Fig. 1). The findings from this study will provide insight for couples and assist therapists who work with couples in premarital counseling as well as couples in distress.

Method

Participants

One hundred and forty-seven volunteers (96 females, M age = 40.93 years, SD = 12.62 years; and 51 males, M age = 44.88 years, SD = 13.49 years) participated in this study. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 84 years (M = 42.30 years, SD = 13.02 years). There was no significant difference in the age of male and female participants (t145 = 1.76, p > .08).

Marital status varied across the sample with 11.6% reporting that they were dating; 21.1% living together; and 67.3% were married. Participants had been in their current relationship from one to 43 years (M = 14 years, SD = 11.22). Of all participants, 63% had children living with them. Fourteen percent of respondents reported that their highest education level was some high school; 18% had completed high school; 12% had completed a trade or technical certificate; 25% had completed an undergraduate university degree, and 31% had a postgraduate university degree.

Instruments

All participants provided demographic data and completed the following psychometrically sound scales:

1) Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Short form) (Sharpley & Rogers, 1984) is a seven item scale derived from the original Dyadic Adjustment Scale by Spanier (1976) to measure relationship satisfaction. It has good test-retest reliability (r = .81 over 4 months). As there were no items related to sex or sexual satisfaction, a theme common in couple therapy, we added four items (e.g., I am satisfied with my partner as a sexual partner; I have good communication with my partner about sex).

2) Adaptive Loving Scale (Campbell & Moore, 2005a) contains 26 items to assess five themes of adaptive loving: acceptance, trust, care, passion and enrichment of life. Examples of items are: My partner helps me to accept myself more, I trust my partner with whom I really am without reservations.

3) The Deakin Emotional Intelligence Scale (DEIS, Campbell & Moore, 2005b) is a 23-item scale of five factors: emotional self-management, emotional awareness, openness, calmness, curiosity about emotional material and self trust. Internal reliability is good: for the factors α = .70 to .75, and α = .78 for the summated items. Test-retest reliability of the DEIS factors over 3 months is r = .70 to .80, and r = .68 for the total score.

4) The Relationships Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) – respondents chose one of four scenarios which describe the attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, dismissing or fearful. The RQ has good convergent validity with responses to more complex and lengthy assessments of attachment, for example, the Adult Attachment Interview, and good test-retest reliability (r = .71) over eight months. In this model, participants will be classified as either having a secure attachment style (1) or an insecure attachment style (0).

5) The Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) is a 43-item measure of differentiation of self. The total scores of the DSI are indicative of the level that individuals have differentiated themselves from their family of origin. Internal reliability for the DSI is good (α = .88).
Procedure

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited via articles in three Melbourne metropolitan newspapers, and through radio interviews on four regional radio stations. Participants were required to be aged 18 years or more and to currently be in a relationship of at least 12 months duration.

People interested in taking part in the study contacted the researchers by telephone and were sent a questionnaire and a reply paid envelope for the return of the questionnaire. Participants were advised that completion and return of the questionnaire would constitute informed consent. Four hundred questionnaires were distributed by mail and 147 completed questionnaires (36.75%) were returned.

Results

The means, standard deviations, alphas and correlations among the variables are presented in Table 1. Relationship satisfaction was correlated with a secure attachment style, higher levels of emotional intelligence, differentiation of self and adaptive loving. A secure attachment style, emotional intelligence and differentiation of self were also correlated.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Descriptive Statistics and Correlations</th>
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<td>1 Years in Relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Children in the Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Attachment Style</td>
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<td>4 Emotional Intelligence</td>
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<td>5 Differentiation of Self</td>
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<td>6 Adaptive Loving</td>
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<td>7 Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>14.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>11.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ Secure attachment style = 1; insecure attachment style = 0

^ These figures are proportions

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Path analysis using AMOS (version 4) was used to test the model of relationship satisfaction (see Fig. 1). The Independence $\chi^2$ indicated the suitability of the correlation matrix for analysis ($\chi^2 = 324.61$, $p<.001$). The data provided a good fit to the hypothesised model ($\chi^2 = 8.6$, $p=.472$, Normalised $\chi^2 = .959$, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .98, Adjusted Goodness of Fit (AGFI) = .95, Normative Fit Index (NFI) = .97, Root Mean Squares (RMSEA) = .00, $pclose = .70$).

The variables in the model explained 68% of the variance in relationship satisfaction; 32% of variance in adaptive loving, 25% of variance in differentiation of self explained, while the number of years in the relationship predicted 24% of variance in having children living in the home. Attachment security predicted 7% of the variance in emotional intelligence.

Direct Effects

There was no direct effect of emotional intelligence on relationship satisfaction, however, emotional intelligence did contribute to differentiation of self ($\beta = .32$) and differentiation of self contributed directly to relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .20$) as well as to adaptive loving ($\beta = .21$); adaptive loving in turn predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .68$). As hypothesised, a more secure attachment style predicted levels of emotional intelligence ($\beta = .27$), and also predicted differentiation of self ($\beta = .31$) and adaptive loving ($\beta = .45$) however, attachment style had no direct effect on relationship satisfaction. While family status, that is, the presence of children in the home and the years an individual had been in the relationship, did not contribute to relationship satisfaction, as expected years in the relationship contributed to the presence of children in the home ($\beta = .49$).

Total Standardised Effects

Total standardised effects in the data comprise the sum of standardised direct and indirect effects in the model (Table 2) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Although emotional intelligence had no significant direct effect on relationship satisfaction, there was an indirect effect through differentiation of self and through adaptive loving.
yielding a total effect for EI on relationship satisfaction of $\beta = .20$. Similarly, secure attachment had no significant direct effect on relationship satisfaction, yet it too had an indirect effect through differentiation of self, adaptive loving and EI for a total effect of $\beta = .48$. Differentiation of self, in addition to its direct effect on relationship satisfaction, also exerted an indirect effect through adaptive loving, for a total effect of $\beta = .34$. The largest contributor to relationship satisfaction in the present model was from participants’ scores on adaptive loving ($\beta = .68$).

**Discussion**

The aim in this paper was to test an integrated model of relationship satisfaction. The paths in the model explained a substantial 68% of the variance in participants’ scores on relationship satisfaction. Support was provided for the direct effect of differentiation of self and adaptive loving on relationship satisfaction, however, a secure attachment style and emotional intelligence exerted only indirect effects on relationship satisfaction. Despite the lack of direct effects, their overall contributions to relationship satisfaction were substantial ($\beta = .48$ and .20, respectively).
Table 2

**Total Effects in the Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Years in R/ship</th>
<th>Secure Attach’t</th>
<th>EI</th>
<th>DS</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>AL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence (EI)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation of Self (DS)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children at home</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Loving (AL)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was however, adaptive loving that contributed most to relationship satisfaction (β = .68) which supports Fromm’s (1957) early suggestion that adaptive loving, if empirically measured, would potentially form an important part of a comprehensive model of relationship satisfaction. Other researchers and clinicians (e.g., Schnarch, 1997; Sternberg, 1986) have agreed that adaptive love is central to relationship satisfaction.

It should be noted that differentiation of self, that is a healthy separation from one’s family of origin, also contributed substantially to relationship satisfaction (β = .34) and this contribution was enhanced by the influence of emotional intelligence and a secure attachment style, as well as itself informing adaptive loving.

Relationship satisfaction was independent of years in the relationship and whether or not there were children in the home however, as was expected, the number of years in the relationship was predictive of the number of children present in the home. These findings are at variance with Glenn and McLanahan (1982) who reported an inverse relationship between the presence of children and relationship satisfaction and Shapiro et al. (2000) who reported a positive association.

Clearly, the integration and testing of these factors in a simultaneous model has revealed theoretically and empirically relevant associations that diverge from those observed in simple correlations. While attachment style and emotional intelligence both correlated with relationship satisfaction (r = .47, r = .38, respectively) their effects on relationship satisfaction in the model were shown only through their indirect effects on differentiation of self and adaptive loving. As with most constructs, it is often difficult to separate predictors and components: no less so with relationship satisfaction. However, we have attempted to utilise independent measures to reduce common variance between the predictors an outcome variable, in this case, relationship satisfaction.

The findings from this study have significant implications for couple therapists working in pre-marital counselling and well as those working with couples in distress. Clearly, the nature of adaptive loving and the ability to engage in this through differentiation of self from one’s family of origin are as, if not more, important than attachment style and emotional intelligence. In fact, by concentrating on improving the elements of one’s adaptive loving (e.g., trust, acceptance, caring) and differentiation from others, this might also indirectly affect one’s current attachment style and level of emotional intelligence. Future research is required to test this proposition. It will also be important to assess couples level of congruence on the factors in the model to ascertain if this is important in determining relationship satisfaction, particularly levels of mutual satisfaction, and to ascertain the relevance of the model across the age span which, in the current study, was quite heterogeneous but not sufficiently large to enable comparisons. In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive model of relationship satisfaction that is useful for therapists working with couples across various stages of their relationship.

References


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Abstract

Despite over 50 years of relationship counselling services being offered in Australia there has been little research that has investigated who is seeking couple counselling and the issues couples seek to have addressed. Participants consisted of 27 couples (n = 54) and 16 individuals, where only one partner from the couple responded to the questionnaire. Participants attended 1 of the 9 Victorian branches of a national Australian relationship counselling service. Participants individually completed a pre-counselling questionnaire that aimed to explore the factors that might influence which member of a couple seeks counselling including, “who initiates counselling?” and “how satisfied are individuals with their current relationship?” Both men and women reported that the most important reason for them attending counselling was to improve the relationship, to learn how to communicate more effectively with his/her partner and to learn how to resolve conflict. Results showed that there were significant gender differences in who initiated couple counselling, with women initiating counselling more frequently than men. There were also significant gender differences in the level of satisfaction reported with the current relationship and women were significantly more likely to report lower levels of satisfaction with their current relationship than were men. The clinical importance of these findings was explored. This study is part of a longitudinal research project that is exploring outcomes for clients attending relationship counselling in a community setting.

Provision of relationship counselling and education services in Australia commenced over 50 years ago. Despite over 50 years of relationship counselling services being offered in Australia there has been little research that has investigated who is seeking couple counselling and for what reasons couple counselling is sought. Much of the laboratory research over the past 15 years has focused on clinical outcomes but it has been conducted in research settings. One of the criticisms of this approach is the questionable generalisability of findings to clients in real life therapeutic settings. While laboratory research may increase understanding of the effect of particular interventions on specified client groups, there is a need for research on client outcomes in clinical settings where clients have self-referred to agencies that offer an eclectic therapeutic approach. Researchers have often failed to make their findings accessible to clinicians and clinicians often fail to see research findings as an aid to their clinical practice (Johnson, 2000). The current study investigated some of the factors present in couples’ relationships prior to them attending for counselling through a national community based, not-for-profit Australian organisation. This organisation is a major provider of relationship counselling and related services.

An internal report commissioned by the agency (Vidler, 2000) reviewed 30 studies evaluating couples’ satisfaction with counselling published between 1995-2000 and found that only 3 of these studies were conducted in clinical settings. One of these studies (Hampson, Prince, & Beavers, 1999) found that 92% of couples attending 3 or more counselling sessions reported an improvement in their relationship. A German study which evaluated the effectiveness of marital counselling using pre and post measures found moderate improvement in marital satisfaction related to counselling, although the attrition rate was high with only 51% of the original group participating in post-treatment assessment (Hahlweg & Klann, 1997).

Measurement of relationship therapy’s effectiveness is limited because of the small number of couples who seek help and the large time span that usually exists between problem recognition and help seeking (Doss, Atkins & Christensen, 2003). These authors found three relatively independent steps in seeking marital therapy: Problem recognition, treatment consideration and treatment seeking. They found that wives were significantly more involved in seeking marital therapy than were husbands and that seeking marital therapy was not generally a mutual process. Previous outcome studies have shown that the more distressed couples are prior to entering therapy the less likely they are to report moderate and above levels of relationship satisfaction at the end of treatment (Snyder, 1997; Snyder, Mangrum & Wills, 1993). Therefore it appears that assessing the level of personal distress and relationship satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced by partners who are seeking couple counselling, early in treatment is warranted. Christensen and Heavey (1999) have pointed out that effectiveness
research often relies on retrospective data and screened client groups and that it may be preferable to conduct research that occurs in naturalistic settings using clinical efficacy trials.

While there is an absence of research conducted in clinical settings, findings from laboratory settings provides insight into some of the variables that may affect client satisfaction. Hampson et al. (1999) found that couples without children fared best in therapy; whereas couples with step-children made the least gains in therapy. Bray and Jouriles (1995) suggested some common ingredients for good therapy, as seen from the client’s perspective. These include a context in which change is expected to occur; a decrease in negative affect and facilitation of positive interchanges; an understanding of family of origin issues and how the past impacts on the present; a positive therapeutic relationship and creation of an atmosphere that increases the likelihood of acceptance of characteristics in one’s partner that are different to oneself. Positive outcomes in couple therapy as evidenced by interpersonal and intra-personal changes are preceded by changes in affect, cognition and behaviour. One of the problems in relating outcome research to clinical settings is that couples seen in real life settings often present with more complex relationship and personal problems than couples who are seen in research settings (Johnson, 2003).

Research suggests that for clients in individual therapy, goal attainment is linked to client satisfaction (Deane, 1993). In couple therapy the goals for men and women may be different (Werner-Wilson, Zimmerman & Price, 1999). In previous Australian research (Carmady, Knowles & Bickerdike, 2004) it was found that men were significantly more satisfied with the outcome of counselling if they attended counselling with the same goal as their partner than were men who attended counselling with a different goal than their partner. The authors also found that couples who had separated since counselling finished were significantly more likely to have attended counselling with a different goal than their partner as compared to couples who were still together. Werner-Wilson et al. (1999) compared goals listed by individual clients to those of their partner and found that although 83% of couples agreed on at least one goal for therapy within a range of goals, 55% of couples identified different primary goals for counselling. In a survey of 147 couples seeking marital therapy the most commonly reported reason for attending was problematic communication and lack of emotional affection (Doss, Simpson & Christensen, 2004). The authors found that within couples, spouses showed little agreement on their reasons for therapy. The implications of these findings for clinical settings highlight the importance of addressing both individual and couple goals in therapy to ensure that both partners feel that their concerns are addressed by the therapist.

The current research explored some of the factors that are present within couple relationships prior to attending for counselling in Australian community settings. These factors included the issues couples were seeking to address in therapy, who initiated counselling and how long problems had been present in the relationship. Gender differences were also explored.

It was hypothesised that women would initiate couple counselling more frequently than men as anecdotally this is the trend reported by clinicians in the agency. The study also explored gender differences in relationship satisfaction prior to counselling.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were individuals who contacted one of the Victorian branches of a national provider of relationship counselling services and who intended to come to counselling with their partner. The mean age for males ($n=30$) was 34.6 years (range 20 to 64, $SD = 9.60$) and the mean age for females ($n=40$) was 30.40 years (range 19 to 44, $SD = 5.74$). Of the 70 participants who completed the pre-counselling questionnaire, 54 people came to counselling with their partner (i.e., 27 couples). Of the 16 individuals who responded to the questionnaire 12 were female and 4 were male. Of the couples who both completed a questionnaire 44% were married, 52% were in a de facto relationship and 4% were separated or divorced. Seventy-three per cent of participants reported that they had been thinking about seeking counselling for less than 12 months.

**Materials**

The information sheet posted to clients explained that the purpose of the study was to explore factors that contribute to clients’ experience of satisfaction with couples’ counselling and their satisfaction with the outcome of counselling. Participants were informed that their questionnaire responses would be confidential and anonymous. Individuals were asked to complete the questionnaire and not to discuss it with their partner until after the questionnaires were returned. Clients were informed that their counsellor would not know that the couple was part of the research project unless the clients chose to disclose this in counselling themselves. Clients were informed that a second questionnaire would be sent to them after their counselling had been completed and that they may be sent a third questionnaire 12 months after counselling had finished. Clients were informed that each questionnaire would take around 10-15 minutes to complete. Clients were also informed that their counsellor would be asked to complete a questionnaire on his/her perceptions about how the counselling progressed once counselling had finished.
Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained 15 questions including demographics such as age, gender, marital status and household makeup. Clients were asked who initiated counselling, how long problems had been present in their relationship and how long they had been thinking about seeking counselling. They were asked for their main reason in attending counselling. Participants were asked how helpful they thought counselling would be and how motivated they were, and how motivated they thought their partner was, to attend counselling. The 5-point Likert-type rating scale for these items ranged from 1 = “Not at all important” to 5 = “Extremely important”. Scales used for the current study are described below.

Generic Measure of Relationship Satisfaction (RAS). The 7-item generic measure of relationship satisfaction, the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988) was used with responses ranging from 1 = “Never” or “Not at all” to 5 = “Totally” or “Extremely satisfied”. Two of the items, “How often do you wish you hadn’t entered into this relationship?” and “How many problems are there in your relationship?” were reverse scored. With American couples the RAS obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of .86. The RAS for this Australian sample was also $\alpha = .86$, supporting the use of the measure.

Emotional Distance Scale (EDS). A 5-item scale, the Emotional Distance Scale (EDS) was created to measure perceived levels of emotional distance from one’s partner. Responses ranged from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Agree strongly”. Items included “It is sometimes easier to confide in a friend than in my partner” and “My partner keeps most of his/her feelings to him/herself”. Cronbach’s Alpha for the EDS was .76.

Procedure

People who contacted a branch of the agency for relationship counselling between August 2003 and August 2005 were asked if they wished to participate in a joint research project between a local university and the counselling agency. One hundred and fifty information packages were posted to interested couples during this time period. Seventy participants (27 couples and 16 individuals where only one partner in the relationship responded) completed and returned the pre-counselling questionnaire prior to attending their first appointment. Completed questionnaires were returned to the university in reply paid envelopes.

The current study focused on the individual and relationship factors present for participants prior to attending for relationship counselling. The current research is part of a larger longitudinal study examining pre and post counselling factors for clients and also counsellors’ perceptions of the outcomes in counselling for each couple or individual once counselling has been completed. The current paper focuses on the results from the pre-counselling questionnaires.

Results

Chi Square analyses were used to test for gender differences in who initiated counselling and how long problems had been present in the relationship. Results are shown in Table 1.

Significant gender differences were found in initiation of counselling with both men and women stating that women initiated counselling more frequently than men. No female respondent stated that her male partner initiated counselling; however 16% of men stated that they believed they had initiated counselling.

Table 1
Chi-Square Analyses Examining Gender Differences on the item: “Who First Initiated Counselling?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Male ($n = 30$)</th>
<th>Female ($n = 40$)</th>
<th>$\chi^2 (df = 4)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I did”</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mostly Me”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mutual Decision”</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mostly My Partner”</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My Partner”</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p<.001$
Importance of Reasons for Attending Counselling

Respondents were asked about the importance of 10 possible reasons for attending counselling on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely Important). For 4 of the 10 reasons the mean response was over 4, indicating that these were perceived as the most important issues to be discussed in counselling. They were: To improve the relationship ($M = 4.73; SD = .69$); To decide about the future of the relationship ($M = 4.31; SD = 1.14$); How to communicate more effectively with their partner ($M = 4.57; SD = .77$) and How to resolve conflict ($M = 4.50; SD = .87$).

Relationship Satisfaction Prior to Counselling

To investigate gender differences in how respondents viewed their relationship prior to counselling independent samples t-test were performed on the 7-item Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendricks, 1988). Results showed that men scored significantly higher than women on the RAS prior to attending for their first counselling appointment ($t (53) = 2.45, p<.05$). Comparing these results with Table 1 results show that women were the initiators of couple counselling and they reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction prior to counselling than did men.

Emotional Distance Prior to Counselling

T-test analyses on the Emotional Distance Scale (EDS) were performed to determine if there were gender differences. Results showed that women scored significantly higher on the EDS scale prior to coming to counselling than did men ($t (57) = 2.86, p<.01$), indicating that women reported more emotional distance in their relationship with their partners than men.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the reasons why Australian couples seek relationship counselling and to provide some insight into what is actually happening in the couple relationship from both male and female perspectives. Couples in this study had reached the treatment seeking phase of counselling (Doss et al. 2003). The results show that women were much more likely to initiate couple counselling than were men. Not one woman reported that her male partner had been the one to initiate counselling although there were four men who reported that they did. This may be due to individual interpretation of what “initiated counselling” actually meant. It could mean a difference between problem identification and treatment seeking. Doss et al.’s (2003) American study also found that women were significantly more involved than husbands in seeking marital therapy but it appears that this is the first Australian study to show that women are the initiators of couple counselling when their relationship is in distress. Problem recognition and help seeking are two steps involved in the process of seeking counselling. It may be that if women in this study asked their partners to call the agency and make the appointment (as a sign of willingness to engage in couple therapy) women may have believed they initiated counselling whereas if men made the call for an appointment they may have felt they were the initiators.

Women reported significantly lower levels of relationship satisfaction prior to attending counselling than did men. Doss et al. (2004) found that wives identified more reasons for seeking therapy than husbands; they expressed more negative emotionality and less positive emotionality than did husbands. Doss et al. (2004) suggested that when husbands and wives present for relationship therapy they may be doing it for different reasons. Findings in this Australian study support these American findings. It appears this research has not been done before in Australia. The findings have important implications for clinical practice and highlight the importance of the therapist clarifying both individual and couple goals at the outset of couple counselling and working within a framework that acknowledges there are probably gender differences in goals or reasons for counselling to ensure both men and women feel that their concerns will be addressed.

Women also reported higher levels of emotional distance from their partner prior to attending for couple counselling than men. These results suggest that women are the emotional managers in couple relationships in that they are the ones to initiate professional assistance and feel less satisfied with the current state of their relationship than men. These empirical findings will be of benefit to therapists working in the field of couple counselling.
References


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Threat, Shyness, and Their Impact on Making A Personal Introduction Videotape

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of internal (heart-rate feedback) and external (degree of task structure) sources of threat and shyness on university students’ responses to making a personal introduction videotape. Shy and less shy participants, randomly assigned to higher (n=44) and lower (n=43) threat conditions completed measures of appraisal and self-statements before and after this stressor. Shy presenters in a high threat condition (i.e., given heart-rate feedback suggesting anxiety, less structure in preparing introduction) were more likely to appraise the task as a threat than less shy subgroups and reported fewer positive self-statements and a more protective orientation than less threatened shy and non-shy subgroups after the task. Findings suggest strategies to decrease internal and external task threats may help the shy to modify appraisals and self-talk when faced with impression management challenges.

The physical and psychological benefits of involvement in a supportive social network are well established. Hence, there is little wonder that social isolation is recognized as a significant public health issue (Jackson, Fritch, Nagasaka, & Gunderson, 2002). Shyness, the experience of inhibition and anxiety in interpersonal contexts, is one common personality characteristic that may increase risks of social isolation (Jackson et al, 2002). Self-presentation models posit that shyness is related to an over-riding motivation to avoid others’ disapproval, perceived deficits in interpersonal skills and diminished self worth (e.g., Arkin, Lake & Baumgardner, 1986). To date, much of the research on this approach has been correlational and pertinent experimental studies have often used stressors having little relevance to real life concerns of the shy (e.g., Stravynski & Amado, 2001) or to self-presentational models.

If establishing an intimate relationship is a central task of adulthood and the capacity to engender positive impressions contributes to this outcome, then the making of a personal introduction videotape would appear to be an ecologically valid stressor for experimental work on shyness and self-presentation. Presumably the shy and their less inhibited counterparts would have different patterns of response to this task, albeit situational factors cannot be dismissed as potential influences, even among the very shy (e.g., Turner, Beidel, & Larkin, 1986). For example, feedback leading to misinterpretations of internal cues (e.g., Papageorgiou & Wells, 2002) and the degree to which a social situation is structured (e.g., Wenzel & Holt, 2003), are internal and external sources of potential threat that may affect responding.

This research examined how these sources of threat might interact with shyness in predicting responses to making a personal introduction videotape. Based on the sole past study on arousal feedback and social anxiety (Papageorgiou & Wells, 2002), we hypothesized shy research volunteers given heart rate feedback to suggest increased arousal would report more threat-based appraisals and negative self-statements and fewer positive self statements before making their videotape than shy presenters given heart rate feedback suggesting relaxation or less shy comparison groups. We also hypothesized that, after controlling for significant differences on pre-task measures, shy presenters exposed to an external threat (i.e., less structure in preparing their introduction) would report higher levels of threat appraisal, protective self-presentation, and negative self-statements and a fewer positive self statements after presenting compared to either non-shy participants or shy participants given more structure in preparing their introductions. Finally, we hypothesized observers would judge personal introduction videotapes of threatened-shy presenters to be lower in social skills and higher in shyness than those of less threatened-shy and non-shy subgroups.

Method

Participants

Respondents were 50 women and 37 men from University of Wisconsin-Superior, none of whom had previously used a dating-personal introduction service. Respondents were predominantly single (87.4%) and Caucasian (93.1%) with a mean age of 24.43 years (SD=8.80 years). Groups were judged to be relatively lower (n=46) and relatively higher (n=41) in shyness on the basis of a median split on the Shyness Scale (Cheek & Buss, 1981).
Measures

Appraisal of Life Events Scale (ALE; Ferguson, Matthews, & Cox, 1999). Before and after making their videotapes, participants rated adjectives tapping emotions related to threat appraisals (i.e., fearful, threatened, worried, hostile, terrified, frightened) on a 7-point scale of agreement. Alphas for the scale were $\alpha=.94$ (Pre-task) and $\alpha=.91$ (Post-task).

Self-Statements During Public Speaking (SSPS; Hofmann & Dibartolo, 2000). The 10-item SSPS assessed thoughts about public speaking before and after the task. It is comprised of 5-item subscales of negative self-statements (NSS) (e.g., “I’m a loser” and “I will probably bomb out anyway”) and positive self-statements (PSS) (e.g., “This is an awkward situation but I can handle everything”). Items were rated from Extreme Disagreement (0) to Extreme Agreement (6). Alphas for NSS were $\alpha=.75$ (Pre-task) and $\alpha=.83$ (Post-task); for PSS, alphas were $\alpha=.69$ (Pre-task) and $\alpha=.59$ (Post-task).

Protective Self-Presentation Scale (Meleshko & Alden, 1993). After presenting, respondents completed this four-item measure of protective self-presentation, reworded slightly to reflect the personal introduction stressor. Items were rated on a 7-point scale of agreement. An alpha of $\alpha=.80$ was obtained for the scale.

Behavior Ratings. Global ratings of social skills, shyness, and likeability were provided by two undergraduates also blind to hypotheses. Each dimension was rated from 0=Very Low to 7=Very High for each 30 second segment of the videotape. Kappa coefficients were .82 for social skills, .90 for likeability, and .82 for shyness.

Procedure

Volunteers were tested by one of two female undergraduate research assistants. After providing consent, participants listened on headphones to a recording telling them to imagine “you have recently moved to a new city and have decided to use a personal introduction service to meet new people. Today you’ll make your personal introduction videotape. You will have three minutes to prepare your videotape and two minutes to present. The resulting video will be judged by members of the research team. The task may cause discomfort for some participants. We ask you to do your best on this task, but you may also withdraw at any time without loss of extra credit.”

After these instructions, pre-task heart rate was assessed, accompanied by potentially misleading feedback: those randomly assigned to a “lower” threat condition were casually told their heart rate was low and they seemed “surprisingly relaxed” compared to others. Those in the “higher” threat condition were casually told their heart rate was high and they seemed “surprisingly tense” compared to others. After the feedback, task-related measures of threat appraisal and self-statements were completed. Subsequently, a second manipulation assessed the impact of task structure on responses. Specifically, just prior to the preparation phase, less threatened participants were given a topic outline as an option for structuring their introductions. In contrast, more threatened participants were offered the instruction, “Please prepare a personal introduction to let potential dating partners know about you” at the top of a blank page.

Following the preparation time, participants were taken to a partitioned area of the lab designed to look like a small living room and seated in a comfortable facing a camcorder eight feet away. They were told: “Shortly you will begin your presentation. Please try to look into the camera when speaking and not to read. We’d like you to present for the full two minutes. You can pause when needed. I’ll tell you when the time has expired.” Participants were prompted to begin and timed for two minutes. Following expiration of the time limit, post-task measures of threat appraisal, self-statements, and self-presentation style were completed, followed by debriefing.

Results

Lower threat (n=43) and higher threat (n=44) groups did not differ on measures demographics or reported shyness completed before the task. A series of 2 x 2 (Threat x Shyness) analyses of variance (ANOVA) was performed on pre-task and post-task measures of appraisal, self-statements, and behaviour. Bonferroni-adjusted post-hoc tests delineated specific differences for significant interactions. Table 1 presents means for each subgroup as well as main effects and interactions. For pre-task threat appraisals, of the Threat x Shyness interaction indicated high threat-shy participants viewed the upcoming task to be more threatening than less shy participants in either threat condition ($p < .05$). However, the lower and higher threat shyness subgroups did not differ on pre-task threat appraisals. After controlling for pre-task threat appraisals, the interaction for post-task threat appraisals revealed shy presenters given less structure judged the task to be higher in threat than all other subgroups which did not differ from one another (Figure 1).

For negative self-statements (NSS), main effects for Shyness and Threat indicated that high threat-shy presenters engaged in more negative self talk before and after their presentations, although interactions were not significant (Table 1). Conversely, for positive self-statements, the interaction at post-task indicated high-threat-shy reporters presented less positive self-talk than low threat-shy participants (Figure 2). For protective self-presentation, the interaction indicated high threat-shy presenters had a more protective orientation following the task than each of the other subgroups which did not differ from one another on the measure.
Table 1.
The impact of threat and shyness on cognitive and behavioural measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Univariate F values</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>Shyness</td>
<td>Threat x Shyness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat (Pre)</td>
<td>13.05 (9.42)</td>
<td>19.10 (7.35)</td>
<td>12.20 (6.10)</td>
<td>25.11 (5.85)</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>35.92***</td>
<td>4.70*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat (Post)</td>
<td>8.19 (7.98)</td>
<td>12.86 (7.10)</td>
<td>11.76 (6.37)</td>
<td>24.89 (5.22)</td>
<td>28.40***</td>
<td>36.94***</td>
<td>8.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSS a (Pre)</td>
<td>7.67 (4.16)</td>
<td>10.38 (4.54)</td>
<td>8.12 (4.14)</td>
<td>14.37 (5.50)</td>
<td>5.02*</td>
<td>20.45***</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSS (Post)</td>
<td>6.38 (4.62)</td>
<td>10.24 (6.35)</td>
<td>9.48 (5.52)</td>
<td>16.58 (4.76)</td>
<td>16.40***</td>
<td>22.09***</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS b (Pre)</td>
<td>22.29 (3.99)</td>
<td>20.38 (2.82)</td>
<td>22.76 (4.09)</td>
<td>18.05 (4.74)</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>14.88***</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS (Post)</td>
<td>19.33 (3.48)</td>
<td>19.76 (3.63)</td>
<td>20.52 (4.56)</td>
<td>16.53 (5.37)</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>5.60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Self-Presentation</td>
<td>5.48 (4.37)</td>
<td>8.52 (3.56)</td>
<td>6.72 (3.49)</td>
<td>13.79 (3.78)</td>
<td>15.61***</td>
<td>37.71***</td>
<td>5.96*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>4.26 (0.77)</td>
<td>4.14 (1.02)</td>
<td>3.85 (0.80)</td>
<td>3.68 (1.09)</td>
<td>4.67*</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shyness</td>
<td>3.50 (0.95)</td>
<td>3.72 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.93 (0.85)</td>
<td>4.22 (1.43)</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likeability</td>
<td>3.88 (1.02)</td>
<td>4.23 (1.04)</td>
<td>3.73 (0.94)</td>
<td>3.72 (1.08)</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p <.001

1 = Low Threat-Low Shyness; 2 = Low Threat-High Shyness; 3 = High Threat-Low Shyness; 4 = High Threat-High Shyness

a Negative self-statements
b Positive self-statements

Table 1 also reports group differences in observer ratings of shyness, social skills, and likeability for completed videotapes. Subgroups in the lower threat condition were judged to be more socially skilled and marginally less shy (p < .06) than those in the higher threat condition. Observer judgments did not differ, however, as a function of reported shyness level.

Figure 1. Threat x shyness interactions for threat appraisals of personal introduction task.
This study assessed the impact of threat manipulations and shyness on functioning of young adults making a personal introduction videotape. The experimental manipulations indicated that responses to the task were affected by the degree of threat it engendered. Specifically, negative feedback about one’s own arousal was related to appraisals of increased threat in anticipation of the presentation, especially for highly shy participants. Moreover, compared to a shy subgroup provided with increased structure to prepare their introductions or to non-shy subgroups, shy presenters given less preparatory structure engaged in less positive self-talk and scored higher on measures of threat appraisal and protective self-presentations upon completing the task. Together, these findings suggest strategies that reduce negative interpretations of introceptive cues and decrease task ambiguity may foster adaptive shifts in subjective appraisals and self-talk of the shy.

Somewhat ironically, if subjective experiences of more threatened shy presenters differed from those of other subgroups, observers viewing the personal introductions did not rate social skills, shyness, or likeability of shy presenters more negatively than those of the less shy. This finding suggests that, to some extent, shyness is a self-imposed prison having little to do with obvious decrements in global social skills. Even though self-reported shyness of presenters was not related to observer impressions of videotapes, the amount of structure participants had been provided in generating their presentations was associated with observer ratings of social skills and shyness. This finding bolsters the contention that social performance of more and less socially anxious persons is often indistinguishable to observers for well-structured experimental tasks (Norton & Hope, 2001).

Strengths of this study included its use of 1) subjective and observer ratings 2) a stressor with relevance for both self-presentation models and developmental psychology, and 3) manipulations to assess interactions of shyness and distinct sources of threat on responding. However, extensions are needed to better demonstrate the validity of this stressor and the utility of strategies designed to reduce perceptions of threat among shy communicators. Extensions are also warranted in contexts of ongoing reciprocal transactions wherein one’s partner affects the course and flow of communication.

References

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Do Opposites Attract in the Bedroom?

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Abstract

It is often said that opposites attract. How does this apply to our sexual appetites? The present research investigates a pilot sample of twenty six couples to answer the following questions: Do opposites really attract, specifically are partners more similar or different in terms of the personality types of introversion and extraversion? Do partners have similar levels of sexual desire? Is our satisfaction with our relationship related to these similarities and/or differences?

Participants anonymously completed a self report extraversion/ introversion scale and sexual desire inventory. The inventory examined an individual’s desire for solitary sexual activity as well as dyadic activity. Preliminary findings indicated that partners did significantly differ in sexual desire scores but not in personality styles. Exploratory analysis with a larger sample, including non paired individuals, revealed that males had higher sexual desire levels than females and level of sexual desire decreased as age increased. Additional interesting findings included a positive relationship between extroversion traits and high levels of sexual desire and a decrease in relationship satisfaction as length of relationship increased. Further results and implications are discussed.

Human sexual behaviour has increasingly becoming a subject of scientific investigation, standing as a complex phenomenon determined and influenced by physiological, sociological and psychological factors. The concept of sexual desire has not received much attention and research is only in its formative stages. However, due to the increasing numbers of couples flooding therapy clinics complaining of desire discrepancies (Leiblum & Pervin, 1980), clinicians and researchers have become more aware of this problem and have recognised the need for its further exploration.

According to Kaplan (1995) sexual desire is a motivational state that is generated and controlled by specific neurophysiologic processes in the brain. Symptomatic loss of libido is now a common problem, and recent research found that 43% of women and 31% of men experience difficulty with sexual desire (Laumann, Paik & Rosen, 1999).

Low sexual desire in and of itself may not be problematic, however once paired with a mate who may not share a similar sexual desire level, tensions could unfold. It is estimated that six out of ten women and four out of ten men will have a level of desire lower than their partners (Birch, 1998). Gottman (1999) found that in the conflict-avoiding couples he studied, 30% had major sexual problems, mostly involving mismatches in desired frequency of intercourse.

Anderson and Cyranowski (1995) believe conflict and friction may arise when one partner is significantly less or more interested in sex than their companion, and that without professional assistance or guidance the relationship could become unhealthy, bitter or eventually break down. When desire fades in one partner, other related issues surface causing further problems. It is not uncommon for intimacy to drop out on all levels, in addition to the sexual, in the presence of a desire discrepancy. For example, couples cease to engage in meaningful conversation and open communication, increasing their risk of infidelity or divorce. Sexual feelings may be siphoned off by anger, hostility, distrust, power struggles, and lack of respect or affection, which in turn may potentially depress sexual desire further (Stuart, Hammond, & Pett, 1987). Thus relationship distress and desire discrepancies affect each other in a reciprocal, mutually causal relationship, as opposed to a one-way linear relationship (LoPiccolo & Friedman, 1988).

One potentially contributing factor to the complex interplay of desire and relationship satisfaction may be personality style. Extraversion traits may serve to differentiate couples and/or may be related to sexual desire. Previous research has not directly examined the relationship between extraversion and sexual desire. However, since sexual desire is the first phase in the sexual response cycle that preludes any sexual behaviour such as arousal or orgasm (Kaplan, 1979), it can be extrapolated that if sexual behaviour and personality are related similar results will be found when examining sexual desire.

Eysenck (1972) explored the relationship between personality and sexuality. He reported that persons with an extroverted style tended to: (a) have sexual intercourse earlier than introverts; (b) have intercourse more frequently than introverts; (c) display more varied sexual behaviour outside of intercourse; (d) use more different positions in intercourse than introverts and (e) display longer precoital lovemaking than introverts. Eysenck argued that personality, like sexuality, was biologically and neuro-physiologically based.
The aim of the current study was to explore the relationships between sexual desire, personality style and relationship satisfaction. The research questions consisted of the following: 1) Are partners more similar or different in terms of amount of extroversion traits and levels of sexual desire levels? 2) If partners are more different then similar, will these differences be related to their relationship satisfaction? 3) Is the personality trait of extroversion related to one’s sexual desire? And 4) Do other variables such as age, gender and length of relationship play a role in sexual desire or relationship satisfaction?

Method

Participants

Twenty six couples out of a larger sample of 89 participants over the age of 18 participated anonymously in this investigation. Forty-seven subjects were female (M = 29.68 years, SD = 8.45 years) and 42 male (M = 30.39 years, SD = 10.25 years), 38 were in a current relationship and 51 were single. Seventy percent of the sample had attended a tertiary institution as their highest level of education, 21% had completed V.C.E, and the last 9% had completed their education at year 10 or less. Of the 26 couples 9 were married and 9 were in de-facto relationships. Ten couples had been in a relationship for less than 3 years, 10 had been together between 3 and 10 years, and 6 couples had been with each other for more than 10 years.

Materials

The demographic items included age, gender, marital status, length of relationship (if applicable), and highest level of education. Participants were required to fill out or circle the response that best described them.

The Sexual Desire Inventory (SDI; Spector, Carey & Steinberg, 1996) is a 14 item self-report questionnaire that measures an individual’s dyadic and solitary sexual desire. Respondents were asked to circle the number that best reflects their thoughts and feelings about their interest in or wish for sexual activity, using the last month as a referent. For the three frequency items (Items 1, 2 and 10), respondents circled one of seven options. For the remaining eight strength items, respondents rated their level of sexual desire on an 8-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 to 8, where 0 = no desire and 8 = strong desire. Items 1 to 9 were summed to obtain a dyadic sexual desire score (desire to behave sexually with another person), whilst items 10 to 13 were summed to obtain a solitary sexual desire score (desire to behave sexually by oneself). Item 14 inquired about distress experienced during abstinence from sexual activity. Possible scores for dyadic sexual desire ranged from 0 to 70, with high scores representing high dyadic sexual desire (α = .87). Possible scores for solitary sexual desire range from 0 to 31 (α = .91).

The items for the extraversion/introversion personality scale were obtained from the International Personality Item Pool (2001) website (available: http://ipip.ori.org). For each of the 16 items respondents rated each on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = very inaccurate and 5 = very accurate. Overall personality scores were calculated by summing across all items, after reverse scoring items 7 to 11 and 16. Possible scores ranged from 10 to 50 with high scores representing more extroversion personality traits.

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS; Schumm et al., 1986) consists of three items that measure individuals’ level of satisfaction with their marriage, their spouse and the marital relationship. For the three items respondents rated each on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = extremely dissatisfied and 7 = extremely satisfied. As the sample used in the present study was not limited to married individuals, the word marriage was replaced with relationship, and the word husband replaced with partner. Possible scores range from 3 to 21, with high scores representing high relationship satisfaction.

Procedures

The sample was collected from a variety of populations including postgraduate psychology students, university staff, and members of two large sporting clubs. All questionnaires were completed at a time and place of the participants choosing. All completed questionnaires were put in stamped and sealed envelopes and either mailed to the researcher or deposited into a locked cabinet within the psychology department. As all participants were anonymous there were no consent forms as completion and return of the questionnaires signified informed consent. Partnered participants were invited to give a coded (for the matching of partners) questionnaire to their partner. Single respondents did not complete the KMSS.

Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Paired-sample 2-tailed t-tests were conducted to determine within couple differences. Partners significantly differed in their dyadic sexual desire scores and their solitary sexual desire scores with males scoring higher, \( t(25) = 3.94, p = .001 \) and \( t(25) = 2.44, p = .02 \) respectively. Partners also differed significantly on how long they felt they could comfortably go without sexual activity of any kind with females able to tolerate longer periods of abstinence, \( t(25) = 4.26, p < .001 \). No significant
differences were found between partners on the personality style of extroversion or in their degree of relationship satisfaction.

Table 1
*Means and standard deviations for male and female partners*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic sexual desire</td>
<td>48.64</td>
<td>10.25</td>
<td>39.08</td>
<td>12.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solitary sexual desire</td>
<td>15.58</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>8.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstinence distress</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extroversion</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>55.62</td>
<td>10.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>16.04</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>16.31</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two difference scores were calculated for each couple to indicate the amount of difference between each partner’s dyadic and solitary sexual desire score. Correlations were performed to determine if the amount of difference in partners was related to their level of relationship satisfaction. Non-significant negative correlations were found between partner’s difference in dyadic sexual desire, solitary sexual desire, and their relationship satisfaction. Partners relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly positively correlated \( r = .61, p = .001 \) \((n=26)\). and relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly positively correlated with length of the relationship \( r = -.293, p = .037 \) \((n=52)\). Further within couple correlations of interest are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
*Correlations within couples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q8</th>
<th>Q12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1 desired freq sex w/p</td>
<td>.399*</td>
<td>.571**</td>
<td>.437*</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 freq sex thoughts w/p</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.586**</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 strength of desire w/p</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>-.230</td>
<td>-.257</td>
<td>-.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8 importance of sex w/p</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>-.273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12 importance of sex w/s</td>
<td>-.238</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>-.425*</td>
<td>-.427*</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. w/p = with a partner, w/s = with self*

Examination of the data set including non paired as well as paired individuals was performed. T-tests for independent samples found significant differences between genders on all sexual desire scores, dyadic \( t (87) = 3.83, p < .001\), solitary \( t (87) = 3.56, p < .001\), and abstinence distress \( t (87) = 4.52 p<.001\). The mean male scores for dyadic (49.66) solitary (16.14) and abstinence distress (4.76), were significantly higher than the mean female scores for dyadic (40.46) solitary (10.51) and abstinence distress (3.21). Correlations of interest within the larger sample are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
*Correlations within the larger sample of individuals and couples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Dyadic sexual desire</td>
<td></td>
<td>.475**</td>
<td>.518**</td>
<td>.330*</td>
<td>-.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Solitary sexual desire</td>
<td></td>
<td>.401**</td>
<td>.525*</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.078</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Abstinence distress</td>
<td></td>
<td>.491**</td>
<td>.640**</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>-.006</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Extroversion</td>
<td></td>
<td>.349*</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.246</td>
<td>-.218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.521**</td>
<td>-.147</td>
<td>-.283</td>
<td>-.065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Above the diagonal is male, below female. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)  *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that in terms extrovert/introvert personality styles partners were more similar than different. However, in regards to sexual desire partners significantly differed in all areas – dyadic and solitary activity and abstinence distress. Further examination of sexual desire within the larger sample found that males and females differed significantly, increases in age were linked to decreases in dyadic sexual desire, and there was a significant positive relationship between extroversion traits and high levels of dyadic sexual
desire. The differences in partners did not appear to be related to relationship satisfaction level although length of relationship may play a role.

The lack of differences in couples with regard to traits of extroversion is hardly surprising despite the popular misconceptions that “opposites attract”. Previous research has found only weak non significant negative correlations or positive correlations when examining partner’s personality characteristics such as social confidence and social dominance (Saint, 1994).

There is strong evidence that the differences found in partner’s sexual desire are associated with the overall gender difference in sexual desire. Gender differences in sexual desire have been found consistently in prior research, for example, Person (1996) found that men fantasised or thought about sex 7.2 times a day compared to 4.5 for women. Possible explanations include male’s higher levels of testosterone, a hormone that is predominantly responsible and imperative for the functioning of the sexual appetite centres in the hypothalamus (Kaplan, 1995). Evolutionary psychology would propose that this biological difference is related to differences in their mating behaviours. Men wish to ensure their reproductive success by impregnating an unlimited number of women, whereas women are biologically limited with the number of offspring that can be born and raised (Baker, 1996).

The negative correlations between age and dyadic sexual desire can also be explained physiologically, as many libido suppressants are more likely to occur as we get older such as lack of energy, fatigue, illness, menopause and medications (Riley & Riley, 2000). Furthermore, reproducing at a younger age is related to lower mortality rates and better health in the progeny and thus successful transmission of the gene pool (Baker, 1996).

On the other hand, it is possible that men and woman are not so different in sexual desire but instead our definition and measurement of sexual desire is faulty. Frequently responses used to measure desire are more characteristic of male sexual desire, such as sexual fantasies, a need for sexual activity (Riley & Riley, 2000), masturbation and genital responses (Leiblum, 1998; Tiefer, 1991). This focus ignores the finding by Basson (2000) that women’s sexual responses are most often motivated by intimacy rather than a need for physical sexual arousal or release. Kaplan (1995) also found that a male’s expression and experience of sexual desire appears to be more constant, genitally focused and automatic, whilst for women sexual desire appears to be more varied and influenced by a greater degree of social and interpersonal factors. This is supported by the significant positive within couple correlation for the questions asking ‘how often would you have like to engage in sexual activity with a partner’ (Q1) and ‘how often have you had sexual thoughts involving a partner (Q2), but a notable negative correlation for ‘when you have sexual thoughts, how strong is your desire to engage in sexual behaviour with a partner’ (Q3).

Gender differences in the conceptualization of sexual desire may explain why this pilot study did not find any relationship between differences in sexual desire and relationship satisfaction. A female perspective on intimacy may create discomfort on answering such cold direct questions which refer to ‘a partner’ rather than ‘your partner’. Additionally, perhaps some social and religious stigma still exist which dictate that for woman sex is to procreate or to please her husband, rather than to personally desire. The significance of meeting ones’ partner’s needs was evident in this study. When an individual rated as high ‘the importance of fulfilling a sexual desire through’ (Q8), and ‘the strength of desire to engage’ in sexual activity with a partner (Q3), the partner was more likely to rate as lower the importance for fulfilling his/her desires by behaving sexually with his or herself (Q12).

Relationship satisfaction was overall quite high in this sample, possibly due to the non-clinical nature of the sample, small sample size, and an insufficient range and distribution of age and relationship duration. Therefore, the finding that couples who had been in a relationship more than 10 years reported significantly less relationship satisfaction compared to couples who were together less than 10 years must be viewed with caution. Future research employing a larger sample and more sophisticated methodologies testing a bi-directional model is needed.

In summary, opposites possibly do attract in the bedroom, but this may not impact upon relationship satisfaction. However since gender definitely appears to play a major role in sexual desire, more than just opposite sex heterosexual couples need to be investigated.

References


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Intimacy or Delinquency? How to Create the Best Home Environment for Adolescents

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Abstract

A dysfunctional family environment has been identified as a major contributor to the development of delinquent behaviour in adolescents. The current research focuses on family functioning as perceived by the adolescent and measured by Noller’s ICPS (Intimacy, Conflict, and Parenting Style) Family Functioning Scales. Adolescent behavior was measured via Mak’s Self reported Delinquency Scale developed for Australian Adolescents. The sample comprised 164 adolescents ranging 12 to 19 years of age. It was hypothesized that there would be a negative relationship between adolescent delinquent behaviours and healthy family functioning. The hypothesis was supported, indicating that an intimate family environment with a sufficient amount of parental involvement and a low amount of familial conflict is more likely to produce adolescents who engaged in fewer delinquent acts. Implications for prevention and interventions are discussed.

A range of pathways can lead an adolescent in the direction of delinquent behaviours. Juvenile delinquency can be the first step in a downward spiral potentially leading to aggression, adult criminal behaviour, drug and/or alcohol abuse, unemployment, unstable relationships, as well as further psychological and/or physical problems (Farrington, 1995). The current study focuses on one of the most important factors in the life of the adolescent, their family. The adolescent-family relationship will be examined in terms of Noller’s (1995) three domains of family functioning: intimacy, conflict and parenting style.

Family intimacy, as characterized by supportive, loving and warm emotional relationships with parents, has been found to keep adolescents on a path of normal psychological development and endow them with significant social skills (Barber, 1997). In contrast, lack of emotional bonding or connectedness between adolescent and parent can cause distorted coping strategies, insecure emotions in subsequent interpersonal relationships, and delinquent behaviors (Bradley & Corwyn, 2000). Open and supportive communication between a parent and adolescent is a vital component of a supportive, productive and intimate relationship that can be a fundamental deterrent to delinquent acts (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Previous research has shown that improved communication can improve adolescent behaviors (Farrell & Barnes, 1993).

Lack of communication or miscommunication is likely to result in conflict. It has been contended that intense levels of conflict in the family will generate continuous pessimism and cynicism within the adolescent, elicit highly aggressive and destructive behaviours and place the adolescent at risk for involvement in delinquent acts (Dekovic, Janssens & Van As, 2003). Prolonged, extreme, and poorly resolved interparental conflict that directly or indirectly involves the child has been found to be a major predictor of adolescent problem behaviours (Fincham, 1994). In line with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) parental conflict, aggressiveness and violence provided adolescents with prototypes of delinquent conduct (McCord, 1991). Researchers found that parents who did not demonstrate to their adolescents the benefits and practical means of solving problems and conflicts were likely to encumber the adolescent’s social and emotional development (Fincham, Grych, & Osborne, 1994).

Parental guidance has been found to be one of the most powerful predictors of adolescent delinquent behaviour (Klein, Forehand, Armistead, & Long, 1997). Griffin et al. (2000) found that parental monitoring was most effective in preventing adolescents from engaging in various forms of delinquent behaviours. When parents treated their adolescent democratically yet firmly, when they effectively supervised and regulated their child’s behaviours, and when they exuded warmth and affection, their child had more opportunity to develop autonomy and was less likely to take part in acts of delinquency. Baumrind (1991) found that a democratic or authoritative parenting style was optimal for producing adolescents who were individuated, resilient, achievement motivated, and manifested the least amount of problem behaviours.

The main objective of the current study was to examine the relationship between family functioning and adolescent behaviors. It was hypothesized the adolescents’ perception of high levels of family intimacy and democratic parenting behaviors would be related to lower levels of their self reported defiant and delinquent behaviours. It was also expected that high levels of family conflict would be related to their engaging in increased amounts of defiant and delinquent behaviours.
Method

Participants

The total sample comprised 164 respondents, with 95 (57.9%) females and 69 (42.1%) males with a mean age of 16 years. Two populations were sampled, first year university students (37) and year seven to twelve students (127) from three Catholic secondary schools (one all girls, one all boys and one co-educational school). Respondents were required to be between 12 and 19 years of age and still living at home. The sample consisted of 127 (77.4%) participants from two parent married intact homes, 16 (9.8%) with divorced parents, 13 (7.9%) whose parents were separated, 6 (3.7%) widowed and 2 (1.2%) in de-facto relationships. In addition, 28 (17.1%) of the respondents’ fathers and 8 (4.9%) mothers did not live with them. Parents’ education level consisted of 52 (31.7 %) mothers and 56 (34.1%) of fathers with tertiary education, 92 (56.1%) fathers and 90 (54.9%) mothers with secondary and 20 (12.2%) mothers, 18 (11.0%) fathers with a primary education only.

Materials

A 6-item demographic questionnaire was used to obtain basic demographic and descriptive information about the adolescents and their families. The information could not however be matched with participants responses on the questionnaires due to confidentiality concerns.

The ICPS Family Functioning Scales (IPCS; P. Noller, personal communication, April 2004) was used to measure family functioning. The IPCS is a thirty-item self-report questionnaire measuring three constructs: (1) intimacy – the extent of sharing and closeness, together with the expressiveness and openness in communication [12 items]; (2) parenting style – the degree to which family members contribute to rules and decisions and are autonomous, encouraged to make up their own minds and stand on their own feet [8 items]; and (3) conflict – the extent of misunderstanding and interference, difficulty resolving problems and making plans [10 items]. Items were responded to on a six point likert scale (1 = totally disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = somewhat agree and 6 = totally agree). Scores were calculated by adding items in each domain. Cronbach’s alpha for the domains were calculated: intimacy, 0.92; parenting style, 0.68; and conflict, 0.82.

A modified version of the Self-Report Delinquency Scale for Australian Adolescents (Mak, 1993) was used to measure delinquent behaviors. The original scale contained 40 yes/no items which covered delinquent behaviours ranging from marginally delinquent offences to more highly serious crimes. Five items were omitted, three of which were acknowledged by less than 5% of respondents in the initial development of the scale (Mak, 1993). These items related to the most heinous of crimes such as “starting fire”, “weapons fight” and “indecent assault”. Four “lie” items did not contribute to the total delinquency score. Respondents with more than two or more “no” responses to the lie items were excluded from the analysis (seven participants), as their high tendency towards social desirability shed doubt on the validity of their responses. Two items investigated respondent’s contact with law enforcement officials and did not contribute to the total delinquency score. The “yes” responses of the remaining 29 items were summed to obtain a total score. Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88 was found for this scale. Eight additional items were generated based on the delinquent and aggressive behaviour subscales of the Child Behaviour Checklist 1991 Youth Self-Report (Achenbach, 1991). These items reflected less severe oppositional defiant behaviours and were added in order to measure a greater amount of defiant behaviours.

Procedures

Prior to beginning the research, permission was obtained from the university ethics committee, the Catholic Education Office and school principals. The secondary school teachers provided students with a brief oral and written description of the purpose and nature of the study and distributed information letters and informed consent forms to both students and parents. Students completed the questionnaires in class time while being supervised by the teacher in attendance. To ensure anonymity of the respondents, all consent forms, demographic forms and questionnaires were put in separate sealed envelopes and handed in to the student’s teacher who then provided them, as a class group, to the researcher. In this manner, it was not possible for anyone to know which questionnaires were completed by which student. University students were invited to participate in class and if interested completed the questionnaires in their own time and then deposited forms into separate locked compartments in the psychology department.

Results

Results were analysed using correlations to test for significant relations between the domains of family functioning and amount of adolescent delinquent and defiant relations (see Table 1). As expected, significant negative correlations were found between intimacy and delinquent behaviours $r (164) = -.50, p <.001$, intimacy and defiant behaviours $r (164) = -.51, p <.001$, parenting style and delinquent behaviours, $r (164) = -.36, p <.001$,
and parenting style and defiant behaviours $r (164) = -0.38$, $p<0.001$. In addition significant positive correlations were found between familial conflict and delinquent behaviours $r (164) = 0.18$, $p=0.019$, and familial conflict and defiant behaviours $r (164) = 0.41$, $p<0.001$. Within family functioning correlations revealed a significant positive correlation between intimacy and parenting style $r (164) = 0.81$, $p<0.001$, and negative correlations between both conflict and intimacy $r (164) = -0.51$, $p<0.001$, and conflict and parenting style $r (164) = -0.42$, $p<0.001$.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Intimacy</td>
<td>54.58</td>
<td>13.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Parenting Style</td>
<td>35.07</td>
<td>8.73</td>
<td>0.81**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Conflict</td>
<td>28.28</td>
<td>7.36</td>
<td>-0.51**</td>
<td>-0.42**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Delinquent Behaviour</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>-0.50**</td>
<td>-0.36**</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Defiant Behavior</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>-0.51**</td>
<td>-0.38**</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td>0.67**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 164$, *$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$.

To examine which aspect of family functioning best predicted delinquent and defiant behaviours stepwise regression analyses were performed. The intimacy domain ($β = -0.498$, $p<0.001$) by itself explained 25% ($R^2 = 0.248$) of the variance associated with delinquent behaviors, and was the only variable that significantly contributed to the prediction $F (1, 162) = 53.35$, $p<0.001$. Examining adolescent defiant behaviours, the model with intimacy alone ($β = -0.513$, $p<0.001$) explained 26% ($R^2 = 0.263$) of the variance, $F (1, 162) = 57.75$, $p<0.001$. The second model added conflict ($β = -0.201$, $p=0.01$) which only explained an extra 3% ($R^2 = 0.030$) of the variance in defiant behaviors.

**Discussion**

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between family functioning and adolescent delinquent and defiant behaviours. The first hypothesis was supported in that adolescents who viewed their families as having high levels of intimacy and more democratic parenting behaviours tended to engage in less delinquent or defiant behaviour than those from families perceived to have less warmth and less encouragement of autonomy. The second hypothesis was also supported in that higher levels of family conflict were related to increased levels of delinquent and defiant acts. The results further indicated that the intimacy domain was the most significant predictor of adolescent delinquent and defiant behaviours.

These findings are in line with previous research that showed that the components which made up Noller’s intimacy domain, such as affection, nurturance, closeness, cohesion and openness in communication, were found to be related to lower levels of adolescent delinquent behaviours (Dekovic et al., 2003; Barber, 1997). Noller’s characterization of the domain of parenting style, with high scores indicating families in which members are encouraged to contribute to rules and decision making and be autonomous, is most similar to the authoritative or democratic parenting style described in previous research. Past research suggests that adolescents raised in authoritative home environments tend to engage in less delinquent behaviours (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991). The findings also support the previous contention that intense levels of conflict in the family is likely to elicit highly aggressive and destructive, thus delinquent, behaviours, (Hall, 1987).

This population overall did not have particularly high levels of delinquent or defiant behaviors. Several factors could account for this including the homogeneity of the sample as well as the social desirability factor. The sampling was not random and not necessarily representative of a true cross section of Australian adolescents. Due to the cost of a private school or college education, the participants were likely primarily from relatively high levels of socio-economic status. The self report nature of the measures may have led to response bias due social desirability, ego defenses, and distorted memory. Although, the lie items may have to some extent identified those with unusually low scores, the issue of potential underreporting is far from solved (Mak, 1993). Unique to the particular measure used in this study was the issue of whether or not an adolescent would accurately report law violating behaviours, regardless of promised confidentiality (Mak, 1993).

Multiple informants would possibly have provided a more accurate picture of adolescent behaviours, as well as family functioning. However, perhaps an adolescents’ personal perspective of their family is more informative and predictive, however skewed it may be. None the less, subjective autobiographical information regarding the family could be useful. The restraints put on this research in order to protect participants privacy and avoid institutions’ legal liability warranted that respondents be unidentifiable to the researchers to the extent that participant’s demographic information was not permitted to be matched to their responses. A challenge for future research would be to obtain detailed information on the family from multiple perspectives in order to explore...
what factors may be contributing to the dysfunctional family functioning and in turn the adolescent delinquent behaviours.

A supposition of the current study was that family functioning impacts upon adolescent behaviours, however it is more likely a case of mutual influence over time. This study only measured family functioning at one single point in time. Family functioning is by no means considered a stable unchanging variable, therefore longitudinal research is required in order to determine if changes in the family system impacts on adolescents’ actions. Furthermore, the changeability of the growing adolescent and their effect on the family system must also be addressed. Future research could utilize a longitudinal design and thus investigate the systemic impact of changes in both the family and the adolescent as well as the reciprocal nature of the relationship.

An intimate communicative relationship appears to be key and thus needs to be the focus of prevention and intervention programs for families. Noller (1995) established five significant functions for maintaining healthy communicative patterns in the family which include: discussing and negotiating roles, rules and decisions; facilitating a suitable environment for identity achievement and exploration; encouraging adolescent self-respect and self-worth; promoting a role model from whom the adolescent can learn how to resolve conflict and solve problems; and creating an environment which promotes adolescent autonomy. These patterns need to be taught and encouraged, since it is possible that their presence within families, prior to and during the period of adolescence, may inoculate against delinquent behaviors. Family therapy with parents and adolescents can encourage members to be more attentive and in tune with each others needs, respect each others viewpoints, allow for a reasonable amount of flexibility, and work towards open and supportive communication.

In summation, the family environment was significant in predicting and shaping adolescent behaviour. Family functioning has proven to be a crucial component in the development of adolescent delinquent behaviours, as it is one of the most powerful socialising forces in the life of the adolescent. Parental acceptance, nurturance and intimacy along with encouragement of sharing and expressive communication, appear to be fundamental for healthy family functioning which in turn facilitates positive adolescent development.

References


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The Influence of Gender Role Stereotype on Conflict Resolution Style

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study was to explore the effects of gender stereotypes on choice of conflict resolution strategy. The potential mediating effects of power and restricted emotionality were also explored. It was anticipated that people with masculine stereotypes would use more dominating and avoiding, and those with feminine stereotypes more yielding and problem solving. People high in both masculine and feminine characteristics (androgynous) were expected to use more problem solving and less dominating strategies than other stereotypes. There were 266 participants who each completed a conflict resolution questionnaire (DCMQ-R), the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS). A MANOVA found sex-role type influenced choice of conflict resolution strategy. Post hoc tests revealed that undifferentiated and masculine participants used more dominating strategies than androgynous and feminine participants. Androgynous participants used more problem solving than undifferentiated participants. Undifferentiated participants used more avoiding than all other sex-role types. No differences were found with yielding. Power and restricted emotionality were significantly related to all conflict resolution styles (except for restricted emotionality with dominating) but they did not mediate the effects of sex-role type.

Although considerable research has investigated the effects of gender role socialisation on various behaviours and extensive research has been undertaken in the area of conflict resolution styles, little research has explored the effects of gender roles on interpersonal conflict styles. Other researchers have begun to examine the negative personal and social effects associated with gender role strain (Levant, 1995; O’Neil, 1981). The general aim of this study is to link these three areas by exploring the impact of both gender role socialisation and its associated stress on choice of strategy in interpersonal conflict situations.

Conflict occurs “where one’s perceived interest is in direct opposition to those of the other, and where one’s current aspirations and those of the other cannot be achieved at the same time” (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994, p.5). How the conflict is resolved may be viewed as a process of social interdependence, which exists when each person’s goal achievement is affected by the behaviour of the other (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Johnson and Johnson theorise that the nature of this interdependence determines how individuals interact (cooperatively or competitively), which in turn determines the outcome of a situation.

Conflict resolution comprises behaviours which conclude the conflict resulting in an outcome. The most commonly acknowledged styles of conflict resolution as defined by Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim (1994) are problem solving, dominating, yielding and avoiding. From a social interdependence viewpoint problem solving would be interpreted as co-operative and positive, whereas dominating would be seen as competitive and negative (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

Gender role stereotypes are socially constructed prescriptive ways of behaviour that become the socially accepted norms for each gender (Bem, 1974). Communality and agency have been core features of traditional gender stereotypes (Archer, 1996). The former has been associated with the feminine and refers to an emotional interpersonal orientation while the latter has been associated with the masculine stereotype and refers to a competitive instrumental orientation (Carothers & Allen, 1999). Carothers and Allen found that masculine participants were more likely to use threat to resolve conflict than feminine participants. Bem (1974) theorised that gender typed individuals have an internalised gender role standard that motivates them to maintain consistency between their behaviour and this standard. She suggested that individuals without this internalised standard would be psychologically healthier due to a less restricted range of available behaviours across situations. Such individuals are androgynous and can engage equally in masculine and feminine behaviours. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI, Bem, 1974) is used to classify individuals into one of four types: androgynous, masculine, feminine, or undifferentiated.

O’Neil, Helms, Gable, Laurence, and Wrightsman (1986) defined gender role conflict as a psychological state produced by the negative consequences of socialised gender roles. It occurs when acceptance of rigid gender roles restricts a person’s behaviour or self-expression and produces such personal outcomes as anxiety, depression and suicide, while interpersonal outcomes may be broken relationships due to power and control.

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1 Gender role strain is also referred to as gender role conflict or gender role stress.
issues or restricted emotional expression (Levant, 1995). O’Neil et al. developed the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS), to measure this internal conflict with gender roles. The GRCS produces measures of power and restricted emotionality which are associated with traditional masculine gender-role stereotypes (Levant, 1995; O’Neil, 1981).

In the present study it was hypothesised that people with a masculine sex-role type would use more dominating and avoiding strategies than those with a feminine sex-role type and that feminine people would use more yielding and problem solving strategies than masculine people. To reflect the apparent social change to more egalitarian gender role norms it was anticipated that androgynous people would use more problem solving and less dominating strategies than other stereotypes. Mediating effects of power and restricted emotionality were also tested.

Method

Participants

Participants were 266 adult volunteers of whom 52% were university students, 32% were from the general community and 16% were former clients at Relationships Australia (Tasmania). The age distribution was 46% 18-25 years, 30% 26-45 years, and 24% over 45. Overall 69% were female.

Materials

Conflict Styles Questionnaire (DCMQ-R). This comprises 12 conflict scenarios relating to conflicts in intimate relationships designed by the author drawing on some items from a Dual Concern Model Questionnaire designed by Bonde (2003). Each conflict situation is followed by four resolution scenarios relating to avoiding, yielding, problem solving and dominating strategies. Participants read through each scenario and rate their likelihood of using each of the four strategies on a Likert Scale, where 0 is very unlikely and 6 is very likely for them.

Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS). This is a 37-item questionnaire which assesses personal gender-role attitudes, behaviours and conflicts. Thirteen items relate to Factor 1 – power, and ten items relate to Factor 2 – restricted emotionality. Two other factors were not included as they were not relevant. Participants rate their level of agreement with each item on a Likert scale with 6 representing strongly agree and 1 representing strongly disagree. For a comprehensive description of the scale development, see O’Neil, Helms, Gable, Laurence, and Wrightsman (1986).

Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). It contains 60 personality characteristics, 20 of which are stereotypically masculine, 20 stereotypically feminine and 20 serve as neutral filler items. Participants indicate on a 7-point Likert scale how well each of the characteristics describes him or herself. The scale ranges from 1 representing “Never or almost never true” to 7 representing “Always or almost always true”.

Procedure

Participants were recruited by notices on community and university noticeboards, presentations at lectures, and a mail-out to past clients of Relationships Australia (Tasmania). Questionnaire packages containing an information sheet, the questionnaires, and a demographics sheet were distributed to respondents. Questionnaires were anonymous, and were returned by reply-paid post or deposited in a box at the School of Psychology. Only data from participants who completed all three questionnaires were analysed. Participants were advised that they could complete the questionnaires in any order of their choosing.

Results

In order to classify participants into their sex-role type using the BSRI, median scores on both the masculine and feminine scales were used. Those scoring high on the masculine scale and low on the feminine scale were classified as masculine; those high on the feminine scale and low on the masculine scale were classified as feminine; participants scoring low on both scales were categorised as undifferentiated, and those scoring high on both scales were categorised as androgynous. Means and standard errors for the four conflict resolution styles for each sex-role type are shown in Table 1.
Table 1
Scores on the DCMQ-R Conflict Resolution Styles for Participants Classified by Sex-Role Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Conflict Resolution Style</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex-role type</td>
<td>Yielding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undifferentiated</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androgynous</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study used a mixed design where the dependent variables were conflict strategies (yielding, avoiding, problem solving and dominating). The independent variable was sex-role type (masculine, feminine, undifferentiated, androgynous). A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to assess the effect of sex-role type on choice of conflict resolution strategy. This was followed up by univariate ANOVAs on the individual dependent variables with REGWQ post hoc tests for pairwise differences between means. Finally analyses of covariance were performed using the two GRCS factors of power and restricted emotionality as covariates with pairwise comparisons between the adjusted means. An alpha level of .05 was used for the analyses.

The multivariate test showed significant differences for sex-role type, Wilks Lambda = 0.78, F(12, 686) = 5.74, p < .001. Univariate ANOVAs and post hoc tests produced the following results. For yielding there was no significant difference for sex-role type, F(3, 262) = 1.17, p = .32. For avoiding there were significant differences according to sex-role type, F(3, 262) = 8.62, p < .001. Post hoc tests showed the differences were due to undifferentiated participants using more avoiding than all other types. For dominating there were significant differences based on sex-role type, F(3, 262) = 8.33, p < .001. Masculine and undifferentiated participants scored significantly higher on dominating than feminine and androgynous. Finally sex-role type also produced significant differences for problem solving, F(3, 262) = 5.15, p < .01. The only significant pairwise difference was greater use of problem solving by androgynous than undifferentiated participants. Analyses of covariance were performed to see if the GRCS factors of power and restricted emotionality could be regarded as mediating variables for sex-role type. Both factors were statistically significant covariates for avoiding and problem solving, and only power was significant for dominating. The only preceding sex-role type difference which was no longer statistically significant was the Bonferroni adjusted test between undifferentiated and feminine participants in ratings of avoiding. Overall it may be concluded the differences related to sex-role type were not attributable to power and restricted emotionality.

Discussion

The results showed highly significant differences in conflict resolution strategies according to sex-role type. Differences will be reviewed briefly in relation to each conflict style.

As predicted masculine participants used more dominating conflict strategies than feminine and androgynous sex-role types. Undifferentiated participants also used this strategy more. Previous findings by Carothers and Allen (1999) about the masculine and feminine approach to the use of power in conflict resolution were supported although different methodologies were used. Power significantly influenced choice of dominating which makes sense in terms of a traditional masculine need to assert one’s will. Restrictive emotionality on the other hand did not significantly influence dominating as a conflict strategy. An inability to express emotions has been linked to withdrawal behaviour in interpersonal conflicts and could be expected to promote more avoiding strategies rather than dominating strategies (Levant, 1995).

For avoiding it had been anticipated that there would be significant differences between masculine and feminine sex-role types. In fact undifferentiated participants were the only ones who used avoiding significantly more than other types. Given that there were no significant differences in yielding between any of the sex-role types, the relatively higher use of avoiding by undifferentiated participants is consistent with their greater use of dominating and their lesser use of problem solving in conflict situations. Avoidance as a strategy in conflict may be attractive when there is a power imbalance in the relationship or when fear of failure to assert one’s
dominance over the other is present (Levant, 1995). The impact of restricted emotionality could be associated with fear of exposing one’s vulnerability as Levant (1995) suggests.

As already noted there was no difference in yielding between the sex-role types. This suggests that there may have been some cultural shift in gender roles, with a greater tendency for feminine participants to use problem solving than the stereotypic but unsatisfactory yielding strategy.

Finally the only significant difference for problem solving was a significantly greater use by androgynous than undifferentiated participants. Although the mean use for feminine participants was slightly greater than for masculine participants it appears that the latter are using more problem-solving (which was the highest-used strategy for all types) and fall back on dominating rather than avoiding. This also suggests a shift from the traditional masculine stereotype.

It was anticipated that androgynous participants would prefer problem solving as a conflict resolution strategy and would apply both their feminine and masculine dimensions to conflict situations. Any inclination to dominate was expected to be tempered by the feminine characteristic to resolve issues in a win/win manner. The masculine side was expected to promote assertiveness and reduce yielding behaviour. This hypothesis was partially supported in that problem solving was chosen more by androgynous people than all other sex-role types but was only significant in comparison with undifferentiated people. Given that androgynous and undifferentiated people are defined as extreme opposites of masculine and feminine characteristics, differences in their choice of conflict strategy is not surprising. Androgynous people chose less avoiding, less dominating and more problem solving strategies than undifferentiated people. It appears then that the feminine side may promote a more communal approach for androgynous people.

**Methodological Issues and Summary**

This study did not control for relationship power imbalance or dependency issues in the DCMQ-R questionnaire and no allowance was made for the social desirability of problem solving as a conflict strategy. Being questionnaire-based the conflict scenarios lacked a dynamic assessment of conflict strategies between intimate couples.

Although power and restricted emotionality generally related to the measures of conflict resolution strategy, the effects of sex-role type remained significant, which suggests they are not explained by these two covariate factors. It is of interest that the sex-role categories remain so influential in intimate conflict styles despite perceived major social changes in gender roles. The fact that problem solving was the preferred choice across all categories suggests a more communal or co-operative approach to conflict rather than an agentic or competitive one and may reflect a more egalitarian socialisation process. The study outcomes suggest that gender role socialisation does influence the way couples resolve conflict as do power struggles and an inability to express emotions effectively.

**References**


Adoption, Adult Attachment Security, and Relationship Outcomes

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Abstract
Despite reports that adopted persons are destined for poor psychological and relational adjustment, this conclusion remains controversial. Previous research on this topic has been inconclusive, and has failed to provide a complex assessment of the predictors of adjustment. For instance, whether attachment security plays a key role in later relationship outcomes remains unresolved. This paper presents the results of a longitudinal study of adults who were adopted as infants, and a comparison sample of adults who grew up with both biological parents. Two research questions were addressed: differences in attachment security between the two samples, and the predictive relations between initial attachment scales and relationship variables (e.g., risk in intimacy, loneliness) assessed at follow-up. Attachment profiles at Time 1 indicated less security in the adopted sample than the comparison sample, and these differences were maintained at follow-up. However, adoptees who had not searched for birth relatives did not differ from the comparison sample. Although adoption status (adopted / comparison) was an important predictor of some relationship variables, it became less influential when attachment measures were included. Discussion focused on the complex factors that influence attachment security, and the need for in-depth study of the relational experiences of adopted people.

There is debate as to whether adoption is a risk factor for psychological problems throughout life. For instance, it has been reported that adopted persons have been over-represented in mental health facilities (Brozinsky, 1990), and there is some evidence to suggest higher depression amongst people who were adopted (Cubito & Obremski Brandon, 2000). In contrast, Borders, Penny, and Portnoy (2000) reported similarities between adopted and non-adopted persons on various measures of life satisfaction, while Collishaw, Maughan, and Pickles (1998) found no differences between adoptees and the general population in terms of psychological distress. Accordingly, it is still inconclusive whether adopted people are destined for poor adjustment generally.

Although some adopted persons adjust well to adoption-related experiences, others seemingly have more difficulty (Brodzinsky, 1990). For instance, in many cases adopted children have no knowledge of the circumstances surrounding their adoption and this may lead to feelings of abandonment, mistrust, and uncertainty about self-identity. Perceptions of ‘not fitting in’ with the adoptive family may also fuel such feelings. Research has demonstrated lower self-esteem amongst adoptees who have searched for their birth parents when compared to non-searchers (Sobol & Cardiff, 1983). Leon (2002) noted how adoption specialists have proposed a key issue for adopted persons is loss, and that grief surrounding the loss of a birthparent is comparable to the grief of losing an attachment figure.

From an ethological viewpoint, attachment theory is uniquely suited to addressing issues pertaining to relational adjustment. Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that infant–caregiver relationships share vital psychological similarities to adult romantic relationships. Specifically, the concept of ‘attachment style’ appears important in both forms of relationships. These researchers found that measures of adult attachment were associated with evaluations of adult relationships and with childhood experiences with attachment figures. Other researchers have reported that a secure attachment style is associated with lasting and satisfying relationships (Feeney, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1990). However, there is increasing recognition of the need to conduct longitudinal research to enable a clearer understanding of the causal relationship between the two variables.

The relevance of attachment theory to adoption research is largely due to the adopted child’s loss of biological caregivers (Edens & Cavell, 1999). Despite the need to study adoption in terms of the attachment-separation-loss process, very few studies have investigated the impact of attachment security in adult adoptees. Borders et al. (2000) studied attachment security in adopted adults and their non-adopted friends. Adult attachment and social support differed between the two samples. Adopted persons reported more insecurity (preoccupied and fearful) than non-adopted persons. In addition, searchers reported less social support than non-searchers and non-adopted persons. This research paved the way for scientific inquiry into adoption and adult
attachment, but was limited in several ways: It was cross-sectional, used a categorical measure of attachment, and did not explore ongoing relational adjustment during adulthood.

In short, research has not yet comprehensively explored how the adoption experience may impact on dimensions of attachment security and relationship outcomes in adulthood. The moderating role of search status also needs further investigation. This paper presents the results of a longitudinal study that addresses these issues. Three hypotheses were proposed. First, it was expected that participants who were adopted as infants, in comparison to those raised by both biological parents, would report higher levels of insecurity. Second, insecurity was expected to be moderated by search status, in that adoptees who had searched for birth relatives would be less secure than the comparison sample. Finally, adoption status (adopted / comparison) and attachment security were expected to predict adult romantic relationship variables (e.g., intimacy, loneliness, trust, satisfaction, and commitment) at follow-up.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants at Time 1 included 144 adults who were adopted before two years of age, and a comparison sample of 131 adults who had been raised within an intact biological family. Attrition was minimal, with 138 (95.83%) of the initial adopted sample and 128 (97.71%) of the comparison sample completing measures at Time 2. Due to the very low attrition rate, Time 1 demographic characteristics were reported with the average age for both groups being 37.7 years, whilst approximately 75% of participants were female. Frequency comparisons for the remaining demographic variables (e.g., relationship status, educational level, and employment status) found no significant differences between the two samples.

**Measures**

As part of a larger study, respondents completed measures of attachment initially (Time 1) and at six-month follow-up (Time 2). Additionally, participants reported perceptions of family and personal relationships at Time 2.

*Attachment security* was assessed using the 40-item Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994). Five dimensions of attachment are obtained from this measure: confidence (8 items; e.g., “I feel confident about relating to others”), discomfort with closeness (10 items; e.g., “I prefer to keep to myself”), need for approval (7 items; e.g., “It’s important for me that others like me”), preoccupation with relationships (8 items; e.g., “I worry a lot about my relationships”); and relationships as secondary (7 items; e.g., “Achieving things is more important than building relationships”). Participants responded on a 6-point Likert scale, from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). All five factors were reliable, with alpha coefficients ranging from .74 to .88.

*The Risk in Intimacy Inventory* (RII; Pilkington & Richardson, 1988) is a 10-item scale that measures perceptions of personal risk in intimate relationships (e.g., “It is dangerous to get really close to people”) (α = .91). Again, each item is rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

*The Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale of for Adults (SELSA)* is a multidimensional measure of loneliness (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993). The SELSA yields scores on the dimensions of romantic loneliness (12 items, e.g., “I wish I had a more satisfying romantic relationship”), family loneliness (11 items, e.g., “I feel alone when I am with my family”), and social loneliness (14 items, e.g., “I do no feel satisfied with the friends that I have”). All items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All three scales were highly reliable with alpha coefficients exceeding .90.

*The Investment Model Scale (IMS)* measures perceived satisfaction (α = .97) and commitment (α = .95) in a relationship (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Five items assess relationship satisfaction (e.g., “I feel satisfied with our relationship”), and seven items measure commitment (e.g., “I want our relationship to last forever”). Participants respond to a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (do not agree at all) to 8 (agree completely).

*The Trust in Close Relationships (TS short version)* is a 13-item inventory (α = .96) adapted by Boon and Holmes (1992). Again, respondents can respond to a current or most recent relationship (e.g., “I feel that I can trust my partner completely”). A 7-point Likert scale is utilised ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited through the media, Internet, distribution of pamphlets, and the University of Queensland and University of Southern Queensland psychology pools. Interested participants were mailed a questionnaire package at Time 1 and a second package six months later. The order of administration of questionnaires was counterbalanced.
Results

Adoption and Attachment Security

A MANOVA assessed the effects of adoption status and time. A significant effect of adoption status was found, multivariate \( F(5, 259) = 4.65, p < .001 \). Furthermore, univariate tests indicated that this difference applied to all five scales. The adopted sample scored lower than the comparison sample on confidence, and higher on all other attachment scales (see top rows of Table 1). These same differences were maintained at Time 2.

Search Status and Attachment Security

To investigate the role of search status, another MANOVA was conducted to compare the attachment scales of searchers (\( n = 105 \)), non-searchers (\( n = 32 \)), and the comparison sample (\( n = 128 \)). The analysis again produced a significant overall difference, multivariate \( F(10, 518) = 2.53, p < .01 \). All scales differed across the three groups (at both times) except for relationships as secondary. Post hoc (Tukey) tests indicated that searchers reported lower confidence, and higher discomfort, need for approval, and preoccupation with relationships than the comparison sample (Table 1). However, no significant differences were observed between non-searchers and the comparison sample.

Table 1
Mean Scores (SDs) on Attachment Scales According to Adoption Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>4.62 (.75)</td>
<td>3.18 (.92)</td>
<td>2.10 (.73)</td>
<td>2.99 (.85)</td>
<td>3.13 (.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted</td>
<td>4.20 (.92)</td>
<td>3.52 (.96)</td>
<td>2.28 (.79)</td>
<td>3.35 (.98)</td>
<td>3.57 (.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searchers</td>
<td>4.18 (.88)</td>
<td>3.55 (.95)</td>
<td>2.27 (.82)</td>
<td>3.38 (.97)</td>
<td>3.63 (.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-searchers</td>
<td>4.29 (.96)</td>
<td>3.40 (.99)</td>
<td>2.34 (.70)</td>
<td>3.26 (.90)</td>
<td>3.39 (.88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Mean scores reported as the average across Time 1 and Time 2. Conf. = Confidence, Disc. = Discomfort, Relate second = Relationship as secondary, Need approv. = Need for approval, Preocc. = Preoccupation.

Adoption, Attachment, and Personal Relationships

To investigate the ability of adoption status and attachment scales to predict Time 2 relationship variables, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Seven relationship measures (risk in intimacy, three loneliness scales, trust, relationship satisfaction and commitment) were entered separately as dependent variables. At Step 1, adoption status was a significant predictor of risk in intimacy, family and social loneliness. Confidence was negatively correlated and the other four attachment dimensions were positively correlated with these relationship variables. When the five attachment measures were entered at Step 2, adoption status no longer predicted risk in intimacy or loneliness (Table 2). Beta values confirmed that confidence predicted all relationship variables except romantic loneliness. Discomfort with closeness made unique contributions to both risk in intimacy and romantic loneliness. Three attachment dimensions (confidence, need for approval, and preoccupation) made unique contributions to the prediction of social loneliness.

When predicting trust, relationship satisfaction and commitment, analyses were conducted separately for participants reflecting on a current relationship as opposed to their most recent relationship. For the former group, confidence was the only attachment dimension to predict relationship variables (e.g., trust and relationship satisfaction). For those reporting on a previous relationship, adoption status, confidence, and discomfort with closeness predicted trust, whereas adoption status and confidence predicted relationship satisfaction (Table 3).
Table 2
Predicting Risk in Intimacy and Loneliness from Adoption Status and Attachment Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Risk in Intimacy</th>
<th>Romantic Loneliness</th>
<th>Family Loneliness</th>
<th>Social Loneliness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Status</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Status</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>-.60**</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort with Closeness</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship as Secondary</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Approval</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01. ** p < .001.

Table 3
Predicting Trust, Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment from Adoption Status and Attachment Measures (Complete Model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Current relationship</th>
<th>Most recent relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Rel Sat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Status</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Status</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort with Closeness</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship as Secondary</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Approval</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Rel Sat. = Relationship Satisfaction, Rel Com. = Relationship Commitment; * p < .05. ** p < .01.

Discussion

This research investigated whether dimensions of adult attachment differ between adopted persons and the general population. Further, the predictive power of attachment dimensions on later adult relationship variables was assessed. Results supported the hypothesis that insecure attachment would be greater for the adopted sample than for participants raised by both biological parents. This difference was moderated by search status, with searchers reporting higher insecurity on four of the five attachment scales. As predicted, all of these differences were maintained at Time 2.

The expectation that adoption status and attachment dimensions would predict relationship variables at follow-up was partially supported. Adoption status alone predicted risk in intimacy, family and social loneliness, and when participants reflected on a previous relationship, this variable also predicted trust and relationship satisfaction. However, when attachment measures were included, the predictive power of adoption status was generally reduced. Indeed, the confidence dimension was the strongest predictor of relationship variables, predicting risk in intimacy, family, and social loneliness. Confidence also predicted trust and relationship satisfaction (for both current and previous relationships). However, the remaining associations between attachment and relationship variables were scattered.

These results extend the debate as to whether adopted persons are disadvantaged in terms of psychological adjustment. Within the current study, reports of higher insecurity amongst adopted persons supported the findings of Borders et al. (2000). Furthermore, higher levels of insecurity amongst searchers, specifically, fits with previous studies linking search status to indices of psychological adjustment (e.g., Sobol & Cardiff, 1983). An important finding of the current research was that adoption status predicted adult relationship variables. However, when combined with attachment dimensions, it became less influential. This finding supports the argument that attachment theory provides a useful perspective on the relationship issues that arise for adopted persons (Edens & Cavell, 1999).
There are many complex factors unique to adopted persons that may influence attachment security. As searchers in the current study reported higher levels of insecurity, motives to search for birth families require further investigation. Exploration of adoption issues (such as feelings of abandonment and betrayal, loss of self-identity, belonging, and trust) is needed in terms of identifying possible associations with attachment dimensions. This is especially important given the strong predictive power of attachment for future relational adjustment. Future directions of this project will explore relational experiences of adopted persons throughout their lives, discovering particular challenges and obstacles that are unique to this population. More focus will be directed towards reunion experiences with birth relatives and how roles and relationships are negotiated with adoptive families. Such information should provide a better understanding of potential difficulties that adopted persons might have in terms of relational adjustment and attachment security.

References


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A Closer Look at the Dimensionality of Infidelity and Its Predictors

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Abstract

Further to results discussed in the Proceedings of the 3rd Australasian Psychology of Relationships Conference (2003), the current study examined ways in which attachment, lovestyles, relationship variables (satisfaction, investment, commitment) and environmental variables (quality of alternatives) predicted infidelity in a contemporary Australian sample. Men and women (N=312, aged 18-60 years) participated in the study. While only 20% reported infidelity in their current relationship, 42% reported having been unfaithful to a partner at some time in their lives. The perceived nature of unfaithfulness was explored through respondents indicating whether they ever participated in a list of 25 behaviours with someone other than their primary partner, and whether they thought these behaviours constituted unfaithfulness. These behaviours varied in their level of sexual ambiguity. The dimensionality of infidelity was established via factor analysis of the list, resulting in four factors: Affairs, Fantasy, Flirting, and Outings. On the whole, lovestyle variables were better predictors of these factors than attachment, relationship and environmental variables.

Sexual exclusivity is a western norm associated with intimate romantic relationships, especially marriage. It is strongly endorsed by the cultural majority, yet sex outside primary relationships is widespread (Treass & Giesen, 2000; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Furthermore, individual differences in beliefs about what constitutes infidelity blur the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, making the concept of infidelity difficult to fully describe. Sexual intercourse with someone other than the primary partner is the usual definition, but other behaviours seen as precursors to intercourse or otherwise outside the boundaries of loyalty and trust can also be deemed unacceptable. Additionally, many of the norms associated with relationship exclusivity have changed as women enter the workforce and gain economic independence in greater numbers, leaving substantial uncertainty as to which behaviours short of intercourse are commonly considered unfaithful.

Yarab, Sensibaugh and Allegeier (1998) investigated the behaviours that men and women viewed as unfaithful using a sample of 219 university undergraduates. Results suggested that sexual fantasy was considered unfaithful; leading to the notion that "mental" exclusivity may be seen as important along with sexual exclusivity. Some respondents considered potentially very innocent activities, such as studying together, to be unfaithful, possibly because such activities provide opportunities for future sexual interaction. Fantasising about another person was also considered unfaithful in Feldman and Cauffman’s (1999) study however everyday activities with the opposite sex were nominated as acceptable. Difficulty in delineating the nature of relationship exclusivity was further illustrated in Boekhout, Hendrick and Hendrick’s (2003) study which showed that many men and women in their sample had engaged in both emotional and sexual infidelity, despite endorsing both of these as unacceptable. As well, those who had not engaged in unfaithful behaviour despite having opportunities to do so often reported desiring a sexual encounter with someone other than their primary partner.

As discussed in a previous study (Fricker & Moore, 2003), infidelity is predicted by individual, relationship and environmental variables. Relevant individual variables have been postulated as those relating to beliefs about love/commitment as conceptualised by Lee (1973) in ‘lovestyles’, as well as more generalised styles of relating to others, as conceptualised in adult attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Lee proposed that different attitudes to love, stemming in part from family experiences, influence emotions and behaviours and can be classified into six styles, named Eros, Ludus and Storge, (primary styles), and Mania, Pragma and Agape (secondary types). Briefly, an Eros style involves the need for intense physical and emotional attraction and commitment to another. Ludus is a game playing, flirtatious style of love with no genuine commitment to a partner. The Storge love style is relatively passionless but deep in affection, like a long-term friendship. The secondary love styles are combinations of the above, which result in an obsessive (Mania), practical (Pragma) or unselfish (Agape) approach to love. Infidelity has been associated with the Ludus lovestyle (Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Attachment theory as applied to adults categorises individuals into those who are securely attached (desire warmth and closeness with another without over-dependence), and those who are insecurely attached. These latter individuals include avoidantly attached adults, who report discomfort with closeness and low expectations of partners, and anxiously attached people, who have strong needs to cling dependently to a partner. Infidelity has been associated with both anxious attachment (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002) and avoidant attachment (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999).

Relationship variables that predict infidelity can be derived from the Investment Model of relationships (Rusbult, 1983). This model proposes that variations in levels of commitment to a relationship will influence
decisions to stay or leave, be faithful or stray. Level of commitment is in turn linked to relationship satisfaction, investments (what the person ‘puts in’ to a relationship, including both tangible and intangible inputs), and the environmental variable of perceived alternatives. If there are many attractive alternatives to a relationship, commitment may be weakened. Infidelity is predicted to be associated with weaker commitment, satisfaction and investment in a primary relationship, as well as higher alternative quality. Research supporting these links comes from Drigotas, Safstrom and Gentilia, (1999). Plentiful research has linked low relationship satisfaction with infidelity; Glass and Wright (1985) is a notable example.

In the current study, the aim was to explore the dimensionality of infidelity and examine the individual, relationship and environmental predictors of these dimensions. It was predicted that sexual infidelity would be predicted by (a) lower relationship commitment, satisfaction and investments, (b) higher levels of alternative quality, (c) more insecure attachment styles, and (d) Ludic and Mania love styles. An exploratory aspect of the study was an examination of predictors of the dimensions of infidelity that do not involve sexual behaviour per se, such as fantasy dimensions.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 312 participants (243 women, 69 men) aged between 18 and 60 years (\( M \) age = 31.3 years, \( SD = 11.9 \) years), currently in a romantic relationship of one year or more or who had recently been in such a relationship.

Materials

Adult Attachment. The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1997) assessed adult romantic attachment. On this 36-item measure respondents rated agreement with the items on a 7-point scale ranging from, 1 = disagree strongly to 7 = agree strongly. The two 18-item subscales (avoidant and anxious attachment) were formed by summing the relevant items and Cronbach alphas indicated that both the subscales were reliable at .86, and .90 respectively.

Lovestyles. An 18-item short version of the Love Attitudes Scale (LAS, Hendrick, Hendrick & Dicke, 1998) was used to measure lovestyles. There are six subscales with three items in each to measure levels of Eros, Ludus, Storge, Mania,Pragma and Agape. Respondents rated the extent to which each item pertains to them on a 5-point scale, with 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree. Responses were added to obtain a score for each lovestyle. Each of the subscales was reliable: Eros \( (\alpha = .78) \), Ludus \( (\alpha = .70) \), Storge \( (\alpha = .90) \),Pragma \( (\alpha = .70) \), Mania \( (\alpha = .69) \), Agape \( (\alpha = .77) \).

Infidelity. A list of behaviours was presented to respondents. The list begins with low intimate behaviours and builds to highly intimate acts. Items were adapted from Yarab, Sensibaugh, and Allgeier (1998), with further items added based on discussions with a focus group. Respondents were asked if they had ever engaged in the behaviours with someone other than their current primary partner and whether they considered each of the behaviours as unfaithful. Additionally, participants were asked a separate question as to whether they had ever been unfaithful to their current partner or to any previous partner.

Relationship Commitment, Satisfaction, Investment and Alternatives. Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998)’s Investment Model Scale was used to assess these four variables. All items were presented in the form of statements about a primary relationship, to which respondents indicated their level of agreement, using rating scales which varied depending on the subscale. The subscales were reliable: Satisfaction \( (\alpha = .96) \), Alternatives \( (\alpha = .82) \), Investment \( (\alpha = .74) \), Commitment \( (\alpha = .91) \).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from a Melbourne university \( (N=125) \), the wider community \( (N=112) \), and via an Internet survey \( (N=75) \), using the University Surveyor program. The response rate for distributed surveys was 60%. Student participation partially fulfilled a first year psychology course requirement. Community recruitment involved the senior researcher asking several associates to administer 10 to 20 surveys each to friends and/or colleagues to enable a wide cross-section of participants. Potential participants were recruited through the Internet via advertising the survey link on a University research page. To encourage honest answers, respondents were instructed not to include their partners in the activity. Questionnaires were returned anonymously via mail-back envelopes or through the Internet.

Results

In terms of current relationships, 20 % of respondents reported they had been unfaithful at least once. Seventy percent of the sample reported having been seriously involved with someone else prior to their current relationship, and 42% of these had been unfaithful in these prior relationships at least once.
**Factor Analysis: Assessing the Dimensionality of Infidelity**

To establish the dimensionality of infidelity the Unfaithful Behaviours List was factor analysed, using a principal components analysis with Varimax rotation. The analysis revealed four factors (Affairs, Fantasy, Flirting, Outings) with eigenvalues greater than 1. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.92 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p=0.00$). The communalities between the variables were acceptable with over 66 percent of the variance in unfaithful behaviours being accounted for by the four factors. Cronbach alphas for the four factors (when converted into scales) were moderate to strong: Affairs (0.95), Fantasy (0.91), Flirting (0.78), Outings (0.80). Table 1 shows the loadings (0.4 and above) for each of the factors, the percent of participants who had engaged in the behaviour, and the percent who perceived the behaviour to be an example of unfaithfulness.

Table 1
*Factor Loadings and Frequencies for Unfaithful Behaviors List*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
<th>% done this behaviour</th>
<th>% believe behaviour unfaithful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FACTOR 1 (Affairs)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give oral sex</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual play</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive oral sex</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionately kiss</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep romantic attachment</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go on a date</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term sexual relationship</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall in love</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiss</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold hands</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask someone out</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FACTOR 2 (Fantasy)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasise about receiving oral sex</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasise about sexual intercourse</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasise about giving oral sex</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasise about sexual play</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FACTOR 3 (Flirting)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casually flirt</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have mild romantic feelings</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become sexually attracted to</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow dance</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast dance</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasise about falling in love</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FACTOR 4 (Outings)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to a movie</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to lunch</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to dinner</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Predicting Infidelity**

The extent to which the four infidelity factors could be predicted by individual, relationship and environmental variables was tested through regression. There were eleven independent variables: Eros, Ludus, Storge, Pragma, Mania, Agape, Avoidant, Anxious, investment, alternatives, and commitment. The variable satisfaction was omitted because of its high correlation with commitment ($r = .73**$).

Standard regressions showed the independent variables significantly predicted each factor Affairs: $F (11, 268) = 8.00, p < .001$; Fantasy: $F (11, 268) = 5.33, p < .001$; Flirting: $F (11, 268) = 6.44, p < .001$; Outings: $F (11, 268) = 2.55, p < .01$, accounting for 24.7%, 17.9%, 20.9%, and 7.2% of the variance, respectively. Significant beta weights were as follows: Affairs: Eros (-0.16), Ludus (0.38); Fantasy: Eros (-0.20), Ludus (0.30); Flirting: Eros (-0.18), Ludus (0.18), Perceived Alternatives (0.18), Commitment (-0.16); Outings: Ludus (0.11), Perceived Alternatives (0.14).
Discussion

The principal aim of this study was to further delineate the nature of unfaithful behaviour using a contemporary Australian sample. To this end, the dimensions of infidelity were determined with the use of Factor Analysis. The facets that make up the construct of infidelity were represented as four distinct factors: Affairs, Fantasy, Flirting, Outings. Examination of the frequencies of each factor item gives an overall view of what participants generally view as unfaithful behaviour. Apart from kissing, over 90% of respondents believe the sexual behaviours encompassed in the Affairs factor are unfaithful. Along with sexual acts, these behaviours encompass forming a deep romantic attachment with someone else, falling in love and holding hands. Over half the sample believes holding hands with someone else is unfaithful. The majority of the sample believes that fantasising about sexual behaviours with someone other than one's primary partner is not unfaithful. One fantasy item, 'fantasising about falling in love', fell within the Flirting factor, and while more people believe this to be unfaithful compared to sexual fantasising, the majority (57%) still believe this is not an unfaithful act. Most respondents did not consider the flirting behaviours to be unfaithful and a large majority also believes the behaviours labelled 'Outings' are not unfaithful.

Interestingly, falling in love (Affairs factor) was seen as unfaithful by 84% of participants, whereas becoming sexually attracted to someone else (Flirting Factor) was viewed as unfaithful by only 37%. This finding is noteworthy in that it lends credence to the generally accepted distinction between sexual and emotional infidelity. The phrase 'falling in love' implies not only an emotional attachment but also a sexual attraction. Glass and Wright (1985) found that when emotional and sexual infidelity were combined, dissatisfaction with the primary relationship was greater than when only one type of infidelity was in play. Sexual attraction to another person does not imply sexual interaction will necessarily ensue, nor is it evidence of intention to act. Conversely, dissatisfaction has been found to lower commitment levels and increase the likelihood of infidelity which suggests falling in love poses a greater threat to the stability and ultimate longevity of the relationship than becoming sexually attracted to someone else, thereby accounting for the substantial difference in respondents' attitudes.

Results on the Affairs, Flirting and Outings factors are generally consistent with previous research. The majority of people view sexual behaviours as unfaithful. However, the current results are in contrast with Yarab et al. (1998) and Feldman and Cauffman's (1999) studies regarding fantasy. Clearly this Australian sample conclude fantasising is a common part of relationship functioning as 65% of people believe fantasising about having sexual intercourse with someone other than one's current partner is not unfaithful and 55% of these people have engaged in it.

With regard to rates of infidelity, one fifth of the sample report having been unfaithful in their current relationship, whereas infidelity having taken place in a prior relationship was reported by 42% of respondents, which is an important if not new finding. This is a substantial number, which confirms the prevalence of infidelity and highlights the disparity between attitudes and behaviours in regard to romantic relationships, considering the norms endorsed by the cultural majority condemning this behaviour. It also reconfirms the need to establish the dimensionality of infidelity as exactly what type of behaviour/s respondents considered unfaithful when answering this question cannot be known with a categorical measure. This result possibly indicates lower commitment to relationships with previous partners and suggests relationship and environmental factors are likely contributors. Indeed, findings thus far indicate the presence of individual differences in attitudes.

Of the individual variables, a Ludus lovestyle predicted infidelity across each of the factors, while Eros was a negative predictor on all but the Outings factor. Ludus represents a game playing approach to love, which is secretive and less committed to one partner. On the other hand, Eros lovers display a strong physical and emotional attraction to their partner and are generally highly committed to the relationship. Commitment was the only relationship variable of significance, negatively predicting the Flirting factor. The more highly committed an individual is to the relationship appears to reduce the inclination to engage in flirting behaviours that may be seen as potential precursors to infidelity. Finally, the environmental variable, perceived alternatives, predicted the Flirting and Outings facets of infidelity. Perhaps the belief there are alternatives to the relationship motivates some individuals towards behaviours that 'test the waters'. The more people interact with others (Outings), coupled with ‘casually flirting’, ‘becoming sexually attracted to someone’ and/or ‘fantasising about falling in love’ (Flirting), the closer they may be to finding another partner. However, this does not necessarily imply infidelity or the dissolution of the relationship would follow.

In sum, results illuminate the multidimensional nature of infidelity and the differential attitudes of individuals towards behaviours that many believe should remain exclusive to the primary relationship. Infidelity threatens relationship functioning and stability. How these behaviours are perceived will impact on responses to it and the decision to engage in it. In the current study, individual variables (Eros, Ludus), commitment and perceived alternatives to the relationship predicted various facets that make up this construct. Further Australian research in this area would be advantageous.
References


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The Effect of Workplace Relationships on Employee Job Satisfaction for 25 to 35 year Olds

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Abstract

Work and job satisfaction has been shown to impact upon an individual’s mental and physical health and overall satisfaction with life. Previous research into employee job satisfaction has explored workers’ relationships to their work tasks and their organisation. Less research has been conducted into the impact an individual’s workplace relationships has on their level of job satisfaction, with even less research in this area focusing on younger workers.

The aim of the present study was to determine the role an employee’s co-worker and direct supervisor relationships had in predicting their level of job satisfaction. Sixty-nine individuals participated in the study, 35 males (Age: $M=31.8$, $SD=6.0$) and 34 females (Age: $M=29.5$, $SD=5.0$). Fifty-three participants indicated that they were employed full time; twelve indicated that they were employed part time; and the remaining participants indicated that they were employed casual or ‘other’. Work and job satisfaction was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Job in General (JIG) scales. Results indicate that 52.1% of an employee’s job satisfaction can be predicted by the quality of their workplace relationships, with an individual’s relationship with their co-workers the strongest predictor. Results indicate that the quality of an employee’s co-worker and immediate supervisor relationships does not significantly predict their level of well-being. Implications of the study’s finding with respect to workforce planning are discussed and suggestions for further research are made.

Work is one of the most fundamental of life’s tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991). Research focusing on the biopsychosocial impacts of work satisfaction and dissatisfaction on the modern worker (for a summary see Sweeney & Witmer, 1991) suggests that one’s level of satisfaction with one’s work impacts upon one’s mental and physical health and overall satisfaction with life (Balzer, Kihm, Smith, Irwin, Bachiochi, Robie, Sinar & Parra, 1997; Csiksztentmihalyi, 1992; Earnshaw, Amundson & Borgen, 1990; Kinnunen & Natti, 1994).

Much of the research exploring job satisfaction suggests that satisfaction with one’s job or work is related to the work tasks being undertaken (Balzer et al., 1997). Research completed by Balzer and his colleagues suggests that satisfaction with one’s work tasks is the greatest predictor of overall job satisfaction. Further, it remains the greatest predictor of job satisfaction, independent of the specific work tasks being completed by the worker or the age or gender of worker. However changes in the working conditions of modern employees, including increasing work hours, varying working arrangements and intensifying job demands (Allen, Herts, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Guest, 2002), matched with the segmenting and compartmentalising of many workplace tasks (Hochschild, 1997); as well as the increasingly common current workplace rhetoric of, “do more, for less … and faster” have made it increasingly challenging, particularly for Australia’s younger workers, to find job satisfaction in the specific work tasks they undertake.

Research examining the factors that impact upon an individual achieving and maintaining job satisfaction is widespread, and varied (e.g., Gardner, 2003; Guest, 2002; Oats & Vella-Brodrick, 2003). However, within the 25 to 35 year old demographic; “Generation X” as this cohort has been labelled in popular literature; published research is less readily available. Research does suggest that workplace motivation for Australia’s younger workers is just as likely to be linked to intra-office social connectedness, as it is work task performance (Hays, 1999; Oats & Vella-Broderick, 2003). Longer working hours for Generation X have resulted in an increased need for social support whilst at work. Social activity is pivotal to an individual’s mental, physical and spiritual health, with research indicating that individuals who regularly engage in social activity do experience greater positive well-being (Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000).

The present research explored alternative avenues towards job satisfaction, exclusive of work task satisfaction. We were interested in exploring the effect of workplace relationships on employee job satisfaction, for Australia’s younger workers. The present research was interested in determining if more harmonious workplace relationships with one’s direct supervisor and one’s co-workers would have a positive effect on the individual’s overall job satisfaction and holistic well-being.

It was specifically hypothesised that a respondent’s overall job satisfaction would significantly positively correlate with co-worker satisfaction and direct supervisor satisfaction; and also that co-worker satisfaction and supervisor satisfaction would significantly predict respondents’ perceived level of holistic well-being.
Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 69 individuals: 35 males (Age: \( M = 31.8 \) years, \( SD = 6.0 \)) and 34 females (Age: \( M = 29.5 \) years, \( SD = 5.0 \)). Fifty-three participants indicated that they were employed full time, 12 indicated that they were employed part time, and the remaining participants indicated that they were employed casual or ‘other’. Twenty-two indicated that they presently held positions of management of others, 23 indicated that they did not presently hold a position of management of others, and 24 did not indicate either. The average hours worked per week (not including commuting time) by those participating in the present study was 43.9 hours per week, with a range of 11 hours to 65 hours worked per week. The average unpaid hours worked per week was 7.5 hours, with a range of zero unpaid hours work per week to 30 unpaid hours worked per week. Respondents were drawn from a wide range of employment contexts within the Melbourne area and all participants took part in the present study on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

Measures

In addition to demographic questions, such as; sex, age, occupation, annual salary, level of education, relationship status and relationship length, the following scales were included:

- **Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Job In General (JIG) Scale.** Work and job satisfaction was measured using the JDI and JIG scales (Balzer et al., 1997). The JDI measures the respondents’ present level of work satisfaction in line with five facets of the responding individuals’ work, including satisfaction with other co-workers and direct supervisor. A sixth facet of the respondents work, satisfaction with the job (in general), measured using the JIG scale, is used as a stand-alone measure of overall job satisfaction. The scales are reliable with Cronbach alphas of 0.91 (Satisfaction with Co-workers), 0.91 (Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor), and 0.92 (Satisfaction with Job in General) (Balzer et al., 1997). The authors also claim good scale validity.

- **Mental, Physical and Spiritual Well-being Scale (MPS Scale).** Participant well-being was measured using the MPS Scale (Vella-Brodrick, 1995) containing three subscales, mental well-being, physical well-being and spiritual well-being of 10 items each, measuring positive aspects of the three facets of health. The author claims good scale validity and good reliability for the individual subscales, with reliability coefficients (\( \alpha \)) as follows; Mental well-being (\( \alpha = .75 \)); Physical well-being (\( \alpha = .81 \)); Spiritual well-being (\( \alpha = .85 \)).

Procedure

Participants were recruited via word of mouth. Criteria for participation in the present study included: no children or other dependents reliant upon the participant (this was a requirement for a larger study of which this study was a part), 25 - 35 years of age and currently engaged in some form of paid employment. Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire. Respondents were asked to voluntarily complete the questionnaire and return using the reply paid envelope provided. The response rate was 29%.

Results

Data tended to be moderately negatively skewed but it was considered insufficient to warrant statistical transformation towards normality. No sex differences were found for any of the measures used. Therefore all data was pooled for analysis.

The Effect of Co-worker Satisfaction and Direct Supervisor Satisfaction on Overall Job Satisfaction

Pearson’s correlation coefficients were calculated between global job satisfaction (JIG) and the other specific measures of job satisfaction and are shown in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1 the global job satisfaction measure is positively and significantly correlated with the Satisfaction with Co-workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor sub-scale scores and with Total MPS Well-being.

A multiple regression was calculated to determine the role Satisfaction with Co-workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor had in predicting the variance in global job satisfaction. Satisfaction with Co-Workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor were entered simultaneously. The hierarchical regression model accounted for 52.1% of the variance in JIG scores (\( F (2, 66) = 35.83, p < 0.001 \)) with Satisfaction with Co-workers being the strongest predictor (\( \beta = 0.52, p=0.001 \)).
Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients for the JIG Scale, Co-worker and Direct Supervisor Satisfaction Sub-Scales of the JDI Scale and Total Well-being (N=69)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Satisfaction with Job In General (JIG)</td>
<td>39.49</td>
<td>15.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Satisfaction with Co-workers</td>
<td>36.16</td>
<td>12.39</td>
<td>.682*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor</td>
<td>39.16</td>
<td>12.86</td>
<td>.529**</td>
<td>.471***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Total MPS well-being</td>
<td>93.49</td>
<td>15.66</td>
<td>.461***</td>
<td>.253*</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001 (two-tailed significance)

The Effect of Co-worker Satisfaction and Direct Supervisor Satisfaction on Mental, Physical and Spiritual Well-being

The three sub-scales of the Mental, Physical and Spiritual Well-being Scale (MPS Scale; Vella-Brodrick, 1995) were combined and used as the measure of holistic well-being. The unitary measure of holistic well-being showed good reliability and internal consistency (α = .86). Pearson’s correlation coefficients between the MPS Scale and Satisfaction with Co-workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor; are shown in Table 1. Satisfaction with Co-worker scores were significant and moderately positively correlated with holistic well-being, but Satisfaction with one’s Direct Supervisor was not.

A multiple regression was undertaken to determine the role that co-worker satisfaction and direct supervisor satisfaction had in predicting the variance in holistic well-being. Satisfaction with Co-workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor were entered simultaneously. The hierarchical regression model was not found to be significant and accounted for only 6.7% of the variance in MPS scores (F (2, 66) = 2.39, p > 0.05).

Discussion

Key Findings

The focus of the present study was to explore what role one’s relationships at work had in the facilitation of greater job satisfaction. Further, the focus of the present study was to explore the effect these workplace relationships have on the holistic well-being of Australia’s younger workers.

The results suggest that the quality of co-worker and direct supervisor relationships significantly positively impact on overall job satisfaction. Indeed, more than half of the variability in overall job satisfaction in the present study was accounted for by the quality of one’s co-worker and direct supervisor relationships. This finding supports previous research by Morrison (2004) looking at the role of non-romantic relationships in the facilitation of job satisfaction of hospital nurses in New Zealand. Morrison found that greater employee cohesiveness and the prevalence of workplace friendships resulted in reduced turnover intentions. Job dissatisfaction has been found to have a significant direct and mediating effect on employee turnover (Fields, Dingman, Roman & Blum, 2005; Morrison, 2004). The current finding indicates the need for those involved in workforce planning to consider the promotion and support of the social aspects of workplace relationships, as a way of further improving employees’ experiences of their work.

Previous research regarding the role of job satisfaction on employee well-being has found that job satisfaction does affect individual mental and physical well-being (Balzer et al., 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Earnshaw et al., 1990; Kinnunen & Natti, 1994). The present study failed to support the second hypothesis; that satisfaction with one’s co-worker and direct supervisor relationships would significantly predict one’s level of holistic well-being.

Limitations, Implications and Further Research

The present study explored the role workplace relationships had in facilitating global job satisfaction for employees aged between 25 and 35 years, using co-worker and direct supervisor relationships for that exploration. The results of the study indicate the importance of these two relationships in the augmentation of overall job satisfaction. It should be noted that prior research (e.g., Balzer et al., 1997) implies that satisfaction with work tasks is the greatest single predictor. The high correlation between this and both overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with co-workers needs further exploration. It is plausible that those one works with might well affect one’s satisfaction, both with the specific task at hand and with the job overall.
The sample also reported a slight negative skewing of the study’s data, which may suggest either social desirability effects, or range restriction due to only relatively satisfied people responding. Further research should employ an increased sample size, and endeavour to recruit less satisfied respondents.

Finally, although the present study drew its sample from a wide range of professions and industries all of the respondents in the study were from the Melbourne metropolitan area. Further research could include respondents from rural areas and also respondents from who are geographically dispersed across the entirety of both regional and metropolitan Australia.

**Conclusion**

Generation X is a significant worker demographic in Australian society. The pursuit of holistic health and work-life balance is of increasing importance to these younger workers (Hays, 1999). The results indicate that one’s relationships with co-workers and direct supervisor are a significant factor determining positive job satisfaction for Generation X, although these relationships do not significantly predict holistic well-being.

**References**


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Is My Trust Towards the One That I Love Related to My Attachment Style?

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Abstract

Forty Nine heterosexual couples, who had been in a relationship for 6 months or more completed an attachment style measure, and a trust measure. This data was used to examine if trust scores vary between the securely attached and the not securely attached couples. Within group t-test analyses revealed no significant differences in partnered trust scores. In an analysis of couple data, 33 couples were classified as being securely attached, meaning both partners displayed a ‘secure’ attachment style and 10 couples were classified as not securely attached, both partners displayed a ‘not secure’ attachment style. A mixed/split plot (SPANOVA) analysis revealed significant differences between attachment groups on a trust score and the trust subscales; faith, dependability, responsiveness, conflict and relationship concerns. Eight couples consisted of both a secure partner and a not secure partner. Within these eight couples it was examined whether or not there were any consistencies among partner’s scores on measures of trust.

Intimate or close relationships with others can be the source of the deepest satisfaction and of the blackest misery. Many people are lonely and unhappy, some are mentally ill, simply because they are unable to establish and sustain an intimate relationship in today’s world (Argyle, 1983).

Attachment theory is one in which interpersonal relationships can be understood. Bowlby, considered to be the founder of attachment theory, believed that an attachment bond is developed between the primary caregiver and infant to provide children with a sense of security (Collins & Read, 1990). It is believed that the events and experiences which occur during the child/caretaker relationship strongly influence the nature and quality of close relationships in adulthood (Collins & Read; 1990, Fraley & Davis, 1997). Research conducted by Collins and Read (1990), Feeney and Noller (1990), and Hazan and Shaver (1987) have all found evidence to support the claim that the attachment styles formed in early infant years are also found in adult relationships.

Attachment theory is most suited as a framework for understanding interpersonal relationships, as it explains how love can develop and how it can be shaped by social experience to produce different relationship styles. It explains how both healthy and unhealthy forms of a relationship originate (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Three attachment styles were originally identified (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) a secure, an anxious and an avoidant attachment style. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed a four category model of attachment styles among young adults. It is based on an extension of Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) three category model, except that it has two types of avoidant attachment – a dismissing and a fearful style. Each attachment style is defined in terms of the person’s model of self and the person’s model of others (Simpson & Rholes, 1998).

According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) each attachment style can be defined using a two dimensional approach: positivity of a person’s model of self and positivity of a person’s model of others. Those with a secure attachment style are defined as having a positive self model and positive model of others; they generally have a sense of self-worth and are not anxious as they do not fear abandonment. They also are comfortable with being intimate and therefore are not avoidant in their behavior; they perceive others as being available and supportive (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Those with a preoccupied attachment style have a negative self-model and a positive model of others, they anxiously seek to gain acceptance from others, whilst being non-avoidant in behavior (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). This attachment style is similar to Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) anxious-ambivalent style (Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998). Those with a fearful attachment style have both a negative model of themselves and others. They are similar to those who have a preoccupied style in the sense that they are dependent on others. They are anxious as they fear abandonment, and avoid intimacy for reasons such as fear of rejection (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Those with a dismissing attachment style have a positive model of self and a negative model of others. They fear intimacy for reasons such as negative expectations, and lack anxiety as they maintain an ideology of self worth by criticizing the values of close relationships (Simpson & Rholes, 1998).

In addition to attachment styles, feelings of trust also relate to the success and satisfaction of any relationship (Mikulincer & Arad, 1999). Trust is seen as one of the most desired characteristics within any close relationship.

In a study conducted by Regan, Kocan and Whitlock (1998), it was found that couples when asked to respond in a free response format what they thought were important features of love, the most common was said to be trust, followed by sexual attraction/desire and acceptance/tolerance.
Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna (1985) state that trust is seen to evolve out of past experience and prior interaction and it matures as the relationship progresses. Rempel et al., developed a measure of trust with the intention to describe trust in close relationships. From previous work they described three dimensions of trust: faith, dependability and predictability. Faith can be defined as confidence or belief that the partner will behave appropriately in the future. Dependability can be defined as a partner who is reliable and can be counted on. Predictability can be defined as the ability to predict future behaviour based on previous or past behaviour.

Boon and Holmes (1991) further refined Rempel et al.’s., trust scale and devised a five dimensional interpersonal trust scale. Boon and Holmes’ research suggests that there are five dimensions responsible for the successful development of trust. The first two dimensions, dependability and faith are similar to the dimensions in Rempel et al’s trust scale. The third dimension of trust, responsiveness, is the true concern and desire for fulfilling a partner’s needs rather than his or her own, it shows that their partner truly accepts the person for who he or she really is. Confronting conflict is a dimension of trust in which a person can successfully deal with disagreement and develop solutions to problems, as well as considering the concerns for both parties. Relationship concern is dimension of trust in which there may be a lack of confidence and security in the relationship. Rempel et al.’s, (1985) findings suggest that trust is important in love and happiness and thus trust is seen as playing an important role in the success and development of close relationships.

Ainsworth defined those with a secure attachment style as having mental models of others as being well intentioned, reliable and trustworthy (Coon, 1992). A study conducted by Mikulincer and Arad (1999) examined the link between attachment and trust. Their findings suggested that those who possess a secure attachment style have more trust in their partners than those who possess an insecure attachment style. Kulley (1995) found in a study of 168 college students that those that possessed a secure attachment style scored higher on trust than those who possess an insecure attachment style.

Guerrero (1996) used Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) four category attachment style measure to test the hypothesis that different attachment styles result in differences in the way individuals display intimacy and non-verbal involvement to their partners. It was found using 80 couples that the securely attached scored higher on a measure trust than the insecurely attached participants. Brown (2002) investigated attachment styles in relation to trust with 269 college students and found that the secure attachment style was significantly positively correlated with trust. Therefore in the present research it is expected that those with a secure attachment style would score higher in levels of trust than the not secure.

According to the norm of reciprocity within social exchange theory, it is believed that an individual will tend to match their partner’s contributions in a ‘tit for tat’ transaction. Cole (2001) suggested that if a person perceives that their partner is engaging in deception they too will engage in deception. In accordance with the norm of reciprocity, it can be expected in the present research that if a person views their partner as trustworthy they will tend to match their partners level of trust.

The aim of the present research is to investigate the differing levels of trust among those of different attachment styles securely attached and the not securely attached couples. The not securely attached couples are those identified as either possessing a preoccupied, fearful or dismissing attachment style. It can be hypothesised that trust scores will not differ within couples who possess similar attachment styles and couples who possess differing attachment styles. It can be hypothesised that trust is higher in securely attached couples than to the not securely attached couples.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 49 heterosexual couples who had been in a relationship for six months or more. Couples were recruited using a snowball technique (Bouma, 2000). The mean age of males was 38.8 years (range 18 to 67, SD = 13.5), the mean age of females was 37.29 years (range 18 to 64, SD = 13) the average length of the relationship was 14.52 years (range 0.8 to 41.40 years, SD = 12.27). Out of the 49 couples 16.3% were exclusively dating, 13.3% were in a de-facto relationship and 70.4% were married.

**Materials**

The questionnaires included a demographics page, a measure of trust using the 20 item Boon and Holmes (1991) interpersonal relationship trust scale, and an attachment style scale using Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) two dimensional four-category scale.

Demographics. This section of the questionnaire incorporated questions regarding participants’ age, sex, level of education, current employment status, type and duration of relationship.

Trust The trust scale is a recent 20 item scale intended for interpersonal relationships. It is derived from the 34 item Boon and Holmes (1991) trust scale. This 20 item scale consists of five sub scales: dependability (e.g. “My partner is not someone who can always be responsive to my needs and feelings”), faith (e.g. “I feel that I can trust my partner completely”), conflict (e.g. “Our two styles of dealing with conflicts make me concerned about our capacity to confront problems that arise in our relationship”) and relationship concerns (e.g. “At times I am
uncomfortable when I think about how much I have invested in my relationship with my partner”). All subscales are rated using a seven-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Faith (1 = is not faithful, 7 = is faithful), Dependability (1 = is not dependable, 7 = is dependable), Conflict (1 = can’t deal with conflict, 7 = can deal with conflict), Relationship concern (1 = concerned, 7 = not concerned), Responsiveness (1 = is not responsive, 7 is responsive). The standardised reliabilities (coefficient alpha) for the subscales are: dependability .80; responsiveness .84; faith .78; conflict .74 and relationship concern .72. Overall reliability is .93. The current study obtained a cronbach alpha for subscales: dependability .71; responsiveness .73; faith .80; conflict .69 and relationship concern .70. Overall reliability of current study is .92.

Attachment Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) 35-item attachment scale consists of two sub scales: avoidance (e.g. “I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down”) and anxiety (e.g. “I worry about being abandoned”). It is rated using a seven point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The standardized reliabilities (coefficient alpha) for the sub scales are: avoidance .94 and anxiety .91. This current study obtained a Cronbach alpha for the sub scales: avoidance .92; anxiety .88. Using scoring instructions found in Simpson and Rholes (1998) participants are classified into either a secure or fearful, preoccupied or dismissing attachment style.

Procedure

Questionnaire and information letters were distributed to 75 couples who were eighteen years or older and who were currently in a heterosexual relationship lasting 6 months or more. Out of the 75 couples, complete data from both partners on all variables were obtained from 49 couples indicating a 65% return rate.

Both partners from each couple were asked to complete questionnaires in a comfortable, isolated environment away from their partner. Questionnaires for each couple were returned in a sealed envelope so that data for each couple was not separated. Participants were informed that they could not be identified by name and the completion of the questionnaire indicated that they have given voluntary consent and could withdraw at any time.

Results

Due to a relatively small sample size participants categorized into either a preoccupied, anxious-ambivalent or fearful attachment style were re categorized into a not secure attachment style. Comparisons were then made between the secure and the not secure attachment groups.

The concept of trust has a number of different dimensions which do not contribute equally to the overall measure of trust (Rempel et al., 1985). Using these five dimensions of trust, a within group t-test analysis was used to examine if there were any differences between partnered scores on trust dimensions. Using coupled data, Crosstabulation was used to classify couples as being securely attached, not securely attached and or a combination of both, meaning that one partner was not securely attached and the other partner was securely attached. A mixed/split plot analysis (SPANOVA) was used to examine if there were significant differences between attachment groups (securely attached and not securely attached) on trust dimensions. The remaining couples who consisted of both a secure partner and not secure partner were examined further to examine whether or not there were any consistencies among partner’s trust dimensions.

Within group t-test analysis revealed no significant differences in partner’s trust scores. As shown in table 1, 31 couples were classified as securely attached, meaning both partners possessed a secure attachment style, while 10 couples were classified as not securely attached as both partners possessed a not secure attachment style. Eight couples were also classified into a mixed attachment style, as couples consisted of both a secure and a not secure partner.

| Attachment styles of couples n = 49 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                               | Males Secure    | Not secure      |
| Females Secure                | 31              | 4               |
| Females Not Secure            | 4               | 10              |
| Total                         | 35              | 14              |

An examination was made of the trust scores for the eight couples of a secure and not secure partner. For six of the couples the difference between the trust scores was less than one. For the other two couples the difference was 3.10 & 3.35 respectfully and in both cases the secure partner had the highest trust score. It would seem that a not secure partner may possess similar trust scores to that of their secure partner.
A Spanova analysis was used to determine if there were significant differences within trust dimensions of both male and female between the not secure and the secure couples.

Table 2
*Mean and standard error of estimates for secure and not secure couples in relation to the trust dimensions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Secure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Secure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Secure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Secure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>31</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Secure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis as shown in table 2 revealed that the securely attached couples scored significantly higher on the trust dimensions of faith ($M=6.69$), $F(1) = 43.68, p < .05$, dependability ($M= 6.53$), $F(1) = 20.15, p<.05$, responsiveness ($M = 6.30$), $F(1) = 27.97, p<.05$, conflict resolution ($M = 5.99$), $F(1) = 33.45, p < .05$ and relationship concern ($M= 6.42$), $F(1) = 45.59, p < .05$ than the not securely attached, faith ($M = 5.40$), dependability ($M = 5.05$), responsiveness ($M = 4.85$), conflict ($M = 4.20$) and relationship concern ($M = 4.50$). The securely attached couples are more likely to trust their partner than the not securely attached couples. Analysis also revealed a significant interaction effect, between gender and attachment style for the trust dimensions, faith and conflict resolution. As shown in table 3 the difference between secure and not secure is much larger for females than males for the trust dimensions faith, $F(1) = 8.91, p < .05$ and conflict resolution $F(1) = 5.08, p <.05$. Indicating that not secure females have less faith in their relationship and are less able to deal with disagreement and develop solutions to problems than insecure males.

Table 3
*Means and standard deviations for secure and not secure males and females for the trust dimensions, faith and conflict resolution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Conflict Resolution</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
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<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>6.76</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Secure</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Secure</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate if trust measures vary between the securely attached and the not securely attached couples. It was revealed that there were no significant differences of partnered trust scores for all couples. However differences in trust scores were found between the securely attached and the not securely attached couples. It may also be possible for couples consisting of both a secure partner and a not secure partner to have similar trust scores.

Cole (2001) suggested that if a person perceives that their partner is engaging in deception they too will engage in deception. Results from this research support a similar finding as there were no significant differences in trust scores within couples. There is a lack of research examining the trust scores from within couples where one partner possesses a secure attachment style and the other a not secure attachment style. Results show that even though a partner may not be securely attached, they may possess similar trust levels to that of their securely attached partner. This also supports the norm of reciprocity (social exchange theory) in that; an individual will tend to match their partner’s contributions in a ‘tit for tat’ transaction.

Much research has been conducted on the characteristics of attachment styles. Brown (2002), Guerrero (1996), Kulley (1995) and Milkulincer and Arad (1999) all found that people who possess a secure attachment style place more trust in their partners, compared to the not secure attachment style. There was support for this contention in the present research. Simpson and Rholes (1998) state that those who possess a secure attachment style have a positive model of themselves and a positive model of others; they do not fear abandonment, are comfortable being intimate and perceive others as being available and supportive. Early attachment theory by
Ainsworth also suggests that people who possess a secure attachment style are generally good natured, likeable and they view others as well intentioned, reliable and trustworthy (Coon, 1992).

Although the results obtained support previous research and theories, there are however some methodological limitations which need to be considered. The use of self-report measures may not be a true representation of individuals’ actual characteristics.

The use of dyadic data is another methodological concern, as a partner’s scores are interdependent of each other. Previous research has found significant low to moderate correlations between partner scores, however interdependence does not account for all variation among scores (West, 2001).

In accordance with the social exchange theory, there is little difference on partners trust from within couples, irrespective of which attachment style a partner may possess. A partner who may not be securely attached may possess similar trust levels to that of their securely attached partner.

This investigation also demonstrated that the infant-caregiver bond formed, being the blueprint for future relationship is associated with trust. Differences were found between attachment styles. Secure attachment styles placing more trust in their partners as they have a positive model of both themselves and others. Although results support previous literature, caution must be made with current findings as self-report measures were used as the basis of analysis, independence of partner scores were not taken into consideration and some group sizes were relatively small. Future research could investigate the possible causal links between attachment styles, and trust to further our understanding in why some find it easy to fall in love and others don’t.

References


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Family Cohesion across Generations: Predictors of Intergenerational Solidarity

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Abstract

The intergenerational relationship between adult children and their older parents has become the focus of increasing research. This is essentially due to the aging of the population and the associated increase in the number of older parents requiring family care due to a decline in health. Furthermore, the increasing costs of living and rates of marital breakdown has resulted in adult children returning to the family home to co-reside with aging parents. It is therefore highly likely that high economic and social support demands are sustained between family generations into the latter stages of the life-span. The current study utilized data from a larger study involving 119 adult children and 148 older parents and investigated the degree to which feelings of filial obligation and attachment predicted intergenerational solidarity. The study found that filial obligation was a significant predictor of intergenerational solidarity for both adult children and older parents. Attachment (conceptualized as two dimensions termed avoidance and anxiety) partially predicted intergenerational cohesion with anxiety significantly contributing to older parents’ intergenerational solidarity.

The intergenerational relationship between adult children and their older parents has become the focus of increasing research due to two emerging social trends in Australia and abroad. Firstly, the so called “greying of the population” has seen the global population over the age of 60 years rise to 20% (United Nations, 2004) with many in this age group requiring care due to a decline in well being and functional independence (e.g., Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2001). Research from Australian and international researchers suggests that much of the long-term care needs of the elderly are, and will continue to be the responsibility of informal carers such as adult children, as governments struggle to cope with the “ageing” of the population (e.g., Goodnow, Lawrence, Ryan, Karantzas & King, 2002; Schultz & Schultz, 1998).

Secondly, the increasing costs of living and rates of marital breakdown have given rise to a cohort of adult children leaving home, only to return at a later stage known as the “boomerang generation” (Giarrusso, Stallings & Bengtson, 1995; White & Rogers, 1997). Therefore, while there is a trend for some older adults to increasingly rely on adult children for support, so are adult children continuing to place high economic and social support demands on aging parents.

While research to date has examined the social factors that influence intergenerational family cohesion, few studies have identified the psychological motivations that drive older adults’ and adult children’s feelings of intergenerational solidarity (e.g., Lowenstein, Katz, Mehlhausen-Hassoen, & Pritulitzky, 2003). The few studies that have attempted to uncover the predictors that shape feelings of intergenerational solidarity amongst family members suggest that familial norms or affection may sustain generational cohesion (e.g., Parrott & Bengtson, 1999). However, even fewer studies have attempted to include both these motives in research, instead treating these factors as mutually exclusive. Therefore the aim of the present study was to investigate the well established family norm of filial obligation (i.e., adults’ obligations to meet parental needs) and emotional bonding in the form of attachment in predicting adult children’s and older parents’ feelings of intergenerational solidarity.

Intergenerational Solidarity

Family relationship theorists have argued that intergenerational bonds have been underconceptualised and undermeasured, with familial cohesion often measured as a single indicator such as the frequency of parent-child interactions (e.g., Harris & Associates, 1976). In more recent years research has attempted to expand the theoretical taxonomy of intergenerational relationships in an attempt to capture the complexity and multidimensional nature of intergenerational bonds (e.g., Mangen, Bengtson & Landry, 1988; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Over the last three decades Bengtson and colleagues have developed and tested a conceptualisation of intergenerational cohesion of aging families termed intergenerational solidarity (e.g., Bengtson & Black, 1973; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Mangen, et al., 1988). This conception of intergenerational relations encompassed a multidimensional view of family relationships and has become one of the most widely used theories of intergenerational relationships. According to Bengtson and colleagues (e.g., Bengtson & Black, 1973; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991), intergenerational solidarity may be defined as the “tightness” or “closeness” of bonds between parents and children across six domains of filial relationships. These domains are termed: (1) structure (factors such as geographical distance that constrain or enhance interaction amongst family members), (2) association (frequency of social contact and shared activities between family members), (3) affect (feelings of emotional closeness, affirmation and intimacy between family members), (4) consensus (actual or perceived agreement in
opinions, values, and lifestyle between family members), (5) function (exchanges of instrumental and financial assistance and support between family members), and (6) norms (strength of obligation felt toward other family members). To date, research by Bengtson and colleagues (e.g., Bengtson, 2001; Bengtson & Black, 1973; Roberts & Bengtson, 1990; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997) has provided strong empirical support for the multidimensional nature of intergenerational solidarity.

Filial Obligation as a Motive for Intergenerational Solidarity

Finley, Roberts and Banahan (1988) noted that the family norm of filial obligation was the basis of family cohesion and solidarity in the late 19th century, where expectations surrounding instrumental support held primacy over the emotional needs of the intergenerational family members. Research into intergenerational solidarity suggests that the norm of filial obligation still holds strong for adult children and older parents with both generations reporting that helping behaviour towards parents is often driven by each generations expectations surrounding the duty or responsibility of assisting parents (e.g., Cicirelli, 1993; Silverstien & Bengtson, 1997; Sorensen; 1998; Lee & Sung; 1997). Therefore, it seems that theories of obligation continue to hold, with adult children and older parents still subscribing to the belief that one has a “duty to care” for elderly parents. It seems that this sense of responsibility grounded in either gratitude for a generations’ past support and/or some cultural norm motivates children to care and elderly parents to expect care (e.g., Cicirelli, 1983; Blieszner & Mancini, 1987; Seelbach, 1987). Blieszner and Hamon (1992) further supports this assertion flagging studies proposing filial norms as a factor in sustaining filial responsibility and intergenerational ties (e.g., Graham, 1983; Walker, Pratt, Shin & Jones, 1989).

Nevertheless, contemporary society has seen a shift in family helping behaviour and cohesion to include an emphasis on the importance of affectional bonds and the emotional aspects of intergenerational relationships. It has been proposed that this shift towards the importance of emotional bonds in filial caregiving and support has resulted in adult children and older parents maintaining contact and support by way of choice rather than on the basis of filial norms and responsibilities (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987; Finley et al., 1988; Roberts & Bengtson, 1990; Thompson & Walker, 1984). Research by Bulcroft, Van Leynseele & Borgatta (1989) suggested that children’s helping behaviour is rarely connected with filial or social norms, partly due to the infrequency with which such norms are imposed, especially in western society. Interestingly, Walker et al. (1989) found that filial behaviour was a result of both obligatory and affectional motives. Given these findings, it seems necessary that affectional motives be included alongside motives of parental obligation in future research on intergenerational helping behaviour and solidarity. More recently, research has suggested that the motive of relationship quality may be more appropriately thought of as the attachment bond between adult children and older parents rather than mere affection (Carpenter, 2001; Magai & Cohen, 1998).

Attachment as a Motive for Intergenerational Solidarity

Based on the work of John Bowlby (1982), attachment theory contends that the regulation and management of emotional bonds in close relationships are driven by a socioemotional behavioural system that develops in the early years of life and continues to guide emotion, cognition and behaviour throughout the life-course (Carpenter, 2001). It is proposed that the attachment system motivates an individual to seek comfort and security during distress or threat from a caregiver (i.e., the attachment figure) that can provide the necessary physical and emotional support (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). The regularity with which an individual turns to the attachment figure for support is influenced by the mental representations or internal working models the individual develops about their worthiness to receive care and the responsiveness of the caregiver (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

These complementary mental representations have been conceptualised in the attachment literature as two orthogonal continuous dimensions termed avoidance and anxiety (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998). The avoidance dimension refers to whether an individual will choose to engage or disengage in emotional interactions with the attachment figure. Someone who rates low along this dimension harbours a mental representation of the attachment figure as reliably responsive to their needs and therefore engages in emotional interactions with the caregiver.

The anxiety dimension refers to whether an individual regards him or herself as worth of receiving care and attention. Someone who rates securely along this dimension harbours a mental representation of the self as worthy of having their care needs met. Individuals characterised by either high levels of avoidance and/or anxiety are regarded as harbouring a maladaptive or insecure attachment.

Strong evidence for the existence and function of the attachment system has been provided by observational studies of early mother-infant relationships (see Ainsworth, Blehar & Waters, 1978). Furthermore, research into adult familial attachment indicates that attachment bonds are enduring and the quality of attachment (i.e., secure or insecure) between an adult child and older parent may impact on the amount of help and support exchanged between the generations (Carpenter, 2001; Cicirelli, 1983; Magai & Cohen, 1998, Thompson & Walker, 1984).

More recently, Carpenter (2001) found that familial attachment was related to the level of emotional support provided by adult children to older parents, with secure adult children providing more emotional assistance to an
aging parent than insecurely attached adult children (see also Crispi, Schiaffino & Berman, 1997). Carpenter suggests that secure adult children provide emotional support in addition to instrumental assistance as a way of protecting the filial attachment relationship and thereby maintaining intergenerational solidarity. Similarly, older parent’s familial attachment has been found to mobilise aging parents’ to receive from as well as provide assistance to their adult children (e.g., Thompson & Walker, 1984).

Therefore the aim of the present study was to investigate both the effects of filial obligation and emotional bonding (i.e., attachment) amongst adult children’s and older parents’ feelings on intergenerational solidarity. It was hypothesised that the attachment dimensions of avoidance and anxiety would have a negative relationship with intergenerational solidarity, with low levels of avoidance and anxiety leading to high levels of intergenerational solidarity. It was also hypothesised that filial obligation would be positively associated with intergenerational solidarity, therefore, the higher and adult child’s or older parent’s filial obligation the higher their feeling of intergenerational solidarity.

Method

Participants

The study comprised of 148 independent older parents (43 male, 105 female) aged between 65 and 89 years of age (M = 72.14 yrs, SD = 7.41 yrs) recruited through Melbourne branches of the University of the Third Age and the National Seniors Association. Level of functional independence was assessed using Lawton’s (1971) Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) inventory, with all older parents reporting high levels of independence (M = 13.03, SD = 3.74, scale range 0 – 16). The older parents were all active in the community, and over 90% of parents had reported providing emotional, instrumental and financial assistance to their adult children, while over 70% of these participants reported maintaining close contact and offering caregiving assistance to their own parents. However, over 80% of older parents had requested either instrumental or emotional support from their adult children with reasons varying from the loss of a spouse to retirement and the onset of illness. Accordingly, this sample of participants could be expected to make considered judgements regarding the motives that bind families across generations.

Adult children providing occasional assistance to an independent older parent created an appropriate comparison group from which to gain an understanding about how the contrasting motives of filial duty and feelings of attachment drive intergenerational solidarity. This sample consisted of 119 adult children (40 male, 79 female) aged between 30 to 65 years (M = 50.11 yrs, SD = 9.93 yrs) recruited through local community groups around Melbourne, Australia and the National Seniors Association. Adult children were asked to rate the functional independence of their adult parents using the IADL. In general, adult children rated their parents similarly on functional independence as the older parent sample (M = 15.52, SD = 1.27). Over 41% of adult children provided a combination of emotional and instrumental assistance to older parents, while nearly 23% exclusively provided emotional support. A further 21% of adult children provided a combination of instrumental emotional and financial support to older parents.

Materials

Adult Familial Attachment. Given that no published self-report attachment measures have been devised to assess the mental representations of adult familial attachment, a modified version of the romantic attachment measure known as Experiences in Close Relationship (ECR) scale (Brennan, et al., 1998) was developed to reflect familial attachment bonding. The items in the original ECR consisted of 36 items with 18 items measuring feelings of attachment avoidance and 18 assessing attachment anxiety. These items were modified producing two alternate versions of the questionnaire. The items in one version of the questionnaire were worded such that they related specifically to the adult child’s attachment towards his/her older parent, while the alternate version measured older parents’ attachment to their adult child. The modified familial versions of the ECR consisted of 32 (i.e., 18 avoidance and 14 anxiety) rather than the 36 items as found in the original ECR. Four items were deleted from the anxiety dimension as these items specifically related to romantic attachment and could not be translated into familial attachment analogues. Each item was rated on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). Acceptable internal scale consistencies were found for the dimensions of avoidance and anxiety across the adult child and older parent familial versions of the ECR (adult children sample – anxiety, $\alpha = .86$; avoidance, $\alpha = .93$; older parent sample - anxiety, $\alpha = .89$; avoidance, $\alpha = .72$).

Filial Obligation. Adult children’s filial obligation was assessed via a seven-item obligation scale developed by Cicirelli (1991). The measure assessed caregivers’ global feelings of filial obligation on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$). Older parents’ feelings of a child’s obligation towards a parent were measured using a modified version of the same scale, in which items reflected parents’ thoughts regarding children’s filial responsibilities. The standardised Cronbach alpha for the older parent version of the scale was .89.
**Intergenerational Solidarity.** Intergenerational solidarity was measured using a six item scale developed by Silverstein and Bengtson (1997). This measure is a shortened version of the 26-item intergenerational solidarity scale developed by Mangen et al. (1988). The abbreviated six-item measure consists of item exemplars that best assess the five of the six domains of intergenerational solidarity, namely, structural, affectual, associational, consensual and functional solidarity. Three items, one measuring each of the domains of affectual, associational and consensual solidarity are rated using polytomous scales while three items, one pertaining to the dimension of structure, and two items related to the domain of functional solidarity (measuring receipt and provision of assistance respectively) were rated using a dichotomous response scale.

**Procedure**

Adult children were administered the measures in the form of a pen-and-paper questionnaire booklet. The booklet was sent by mail to the participants’ homes and were asked to complete the questionnaire in one sitting. Upon completion the booklets were returned by mail to the researcher. The older parents were administered the measures in the form a card sorting task conducted in the participants’ homes by the researcher. Participants were presented with a series of large print cards comprising all the items of the inventories used in the study. The cards were presented to the participants by the researcher in the order that the items appeared in the questionnaire booklet administered to the adult children. The older parents were then presented with a laminated version of the rating scale associated with each inventory and asked to place each item over the point on the scale that best describes their feeling or attitude towards the statement. A card task was preferred as the data gathering technique for older adults. This procedure provided a means of obtaining reliable data that would otherwise be compromised by a pen and paper method due to failing eyesight of some older participants. This method also allowed for the face validation of measures not used previously in assessing older parents’ perceptions of filial obligation and attachment.

**Results**

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to assess attachment anxiety and avoidance and filial obligation in predicting feelings intergenerational solidarity held by older adults and adult children. While it would also be appropriate to analyse the impact of attachment and filial obligation using ordinary least squares (OLS) methods, SEM has the advantage of investigating the relationships amongst measured and latent variables and the ability to account for measurement error that otherwise remains unexplained by traditional multiple regression analytic techniques.

The data for both the adult children and older adult samples was examined for missing values, univariate and multivariate normality, outliers, homoscedasticity and multicolinearity. Missing values were replaced by series means and all continuous variables (i.e., avoidance, anxiety and filial obligation) did not violate tests of normality and correlational analyses did not reveal multicolinearity (see Table 1).

It is important to note that the use of coarsely categorised variables is generally undesired in SEM, particularly when either dichotomous or discrete variables with < 5 categories (e.g., Boomsma, 1983; Muthen & Kaplan, 1985; West, Finch & Curran, 1995) are used to represent a latent dependent variable (as in the case of the intergenerational solidarity measure used in the present study). Coarsely categorised variables tend to bias parameter estimates and associated standard errors of structural models (e.g., West et al., 1995). Given that coarsely categorised variables are assumed to consist of an underlying continuous distribution, a solution proposed by Muthen (1984) is to calculate the polychoric and point bi-serial correlations amongst the coarsely categorised indicators and conduct analyses on the correlation matrix rather than the raw data. This in turn is likely to yield unbiased parameter estimates and standard errors (Muthen, 1984; West et al., 1995).

Bivariate correlations (i.e., Pearson, Spearman, polychoric and point bi-serial) amongst the exogenous variables for adult children and older adult samples are presented Table 1 along with means and standard deviations. Correlations for the adult children sample are presented above the diagonal in Table 1, while correlations for the older parent sample are presented below the diagonal. In general, while some significant correlations were found between the attachment dimensions, filial obligation and the six indicators of intergenerational solidarity, most of these relationships were at best low to moderate for both samples. Interestingly, a low positive correlation was found between anxiety and avoidance across both samples. While it is suggested in the literature that the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance are regarded as independent (e.g., Brennan, et al., 1998) it has been reported across numerous studies that a low to high correlation exists between the dimensions (e.g., Fossati, et al., 2003; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt & Zakalik, 2004).
Table 1
Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Adult Children and Older Adults

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>8.23</td>
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<td>0.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation coefficients above the diagonal relate to adult children, below to older parents.

Note: Bivariate correlations above the diagonal relate to adult children, below relate to older parents.

An inspection of the attachment dimension means revealed that adult children and older parents did not differ significantly on their levels of avoidance (M = 3.32, SD = 1.25 versus M = 3.47, SD = 0.78) respectively (t(265) = 1.31, p > 0.05). Both adult children and older parents reported medium levels of filial avoidance (i.e., scale range: 1 (low) to 7 (high)). However, adult children reported a higher mean level of anxiety (M = 2.47, SD = 0.96) than older parents (M = 1.94, SD = 1.00), (t(265) = 4.41, p < 0.05). Nevertheless, both groups achieved low mean anxiety attachment scores. Significant differences were found in levels of filial obligation (i.e., scale range: 1 (low) to 5 (high)) between adult children (M = 3.73, SD = 0.76) and older parents (M = 2.49, SD = 0.89), (t(265) = 12.10, p < 0.05).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The models predicting adult children’s and older parents’ intergenerational solidarity were computed using AMOS 5.0 computer software (Arbuckle, 2003) and estimated using Maximum Likelihood Chi-Square Estimation (\( \chi^2_{\text{ML}} \)). Furthermore, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) model fit indices were selected to evaluate model fit in line with the recommendations put forward by Hu and Bentler (1999) when analysing models with N ≤ 250 while minimising Type I and II error rates.

The initial models constructed for the adult children and older parents’ samples were examined for their goodness of fit and post-hoc respecifications were made by freely estimating parameters on the basis of Modification Indices and Expected Parameter Changes. Modifications to the models were supported by theoretical rationale.

Predictors of Intergenerational Solidarity: Adult Children

The final respecified model for the adult children provided a good fit to the sample data resulting in a non-significant chi-square statistic \( \chi^2(24) = 27.445, p > 0.05 \) and a CFI = 0.976 and SRMR = 0.069 well in line with the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999) for a model of small N and low complexity. The respecified model and standardized regression coefficients for the adult children sample are presented in Figure 1.
Thirteen percent of the variance in adult children’s levels of intergenerational solidarity was explained by the factors of avoidance, anxiety and filial obligation. Filial obligation was found to be the only significant contributor to adult children’s feelings of intergenerational solidarity ($\beta = .32$). While the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance demonstrated relationships in the expected directions, the attachment dimensions did not impact on adult children’s feelings of intergenerational solidarity. However, a low but significant correlation ($r = .24$) was found between the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance which warranted the freeing of the parameter estimate between these dimensions.

Predictors of Intergenerational Solidarity: Older Parents

The final respecified model for the older parents resulted in an excellent fit to the sample data $X^2(23) = 22.53$, $p > .05$; $CFI = 1.00$ and $SRMR = .060$. The respecified model and standardized regression coefficients for the older parent sample are presented in Figure 2.

Unlike the low proportion of variance accounted for by the anxiety dimensions and filial obligation in the adult children sample, 75% of the variance in older parents’ level of intergenerational solidarity was explained by the factors of avoidance, anxiety and filial obligation. Filial obligation was again found to be a significant contributor ($\beta = .82$) as was anxiety ($\beta = -.58$). However, avoidance was not found to be a significant predictor of intergenerational solidarity nor was the relationship in the expected direction.

As with the adult children sample, a low but significant correlation ($r = .22$) was found between the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance. Furthermore, a second significant correlation was found to exist between anxiety and filial obligation ($r = .28$).
Note: For clarity of interpretation error terms not indicated.
*p < .05; ** p < .01.

Figure 2. Predictors of Intergenerational Solidarity – Older Adults.

Discussion

The findings of the present study supported the hypothesised relationship between filial obligation and intergenerational solidarity in both the adult children and older parent samples. It is clear that filial obligation plays a crucial role in mobilising familial generations to maintain a sense of family cohesion. In particular, older parents’ filial obligation seems to be a much stronger predictor of their feelings of intergenerational solidarity than that of adult children (e.g., Seelbach & Sauer, 1977). Therefore, the suggestion by some researchers that family helping and cohesion is rarely driven by filial obligation or norms is highly inconsistent with present study (e.g., Bulcroft, et al., 1989). While it could be argued that specific types of helping behaviour may not be driven by feelings of obligation (e.g., Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein & Litwak, 1993) it is suggested by the present study and previous research that general feelings of intergenerational kinship and support are driven to a significant degree by adult children’s and older parents’ expectations surrounding filial support as a means of maintaining solidarity (e.g., Cicirelli, 1993; Silversten & Bengtson, 1997; Sorensen; 1998; Lee & Sung; 1997).

The hypothesised relationships between the attachment dimensions and intergenerational solidarity were partially supported. As proposed, both anxiety and avoidance were found to be negatively related to intergenerational solidarity across both samples. However, avoidance did not predict adult children’s nor older parents’ intergenerational solidarity. In contrast, anxiety was identified as a significant contributor, but only in predicting older parents’ intergenerational solidarity. Consistent with previous research older parents generally reported low levels of attachment anxiety (e.g., Antonucci, Akiyama & Takahashi, 2004; Mickelson, Kessler & Shaver, 1997) and this was associated with higher levels of intergenerational solidarity. However, the present study revealed a positive association between anxiety and filial obligation for older parents. It could be suggested that highly anxious older parents (i.e., mean anxiety rating > 5) are likely to endorse or impose filial obligation as a means of safeguarding their attachment relationship with their adult child. That is, to combat feelings of low self worth and the constant need for validation, highly anxious older parents oblige their adult children to engage in parental helping behaviour. In the present study, over 7% of older parents were characterised as highly anxious with all reporting high filial obligation (i.e., mean score > 3.5). Thus, high levels of parental anxiety coupled with a sense of filial obligation leads to a low sense of intergenerational closeness. This may be due to adult children engaging in distancing tactics to reduce feelings of parental demandedness likely to overwhelm the adult child.

Alternatively, highly anxious older parents may receive self validation from adult children in the form of appropriate emotional and instrumental support, but due to their high need for validation coupled with feelings of
filial obligation, may inaccurately perceive anything short of excessive assistance as suggestive of low intergenerational solidarity. Such explanations have been put forward by attachment researchers investigating romantic couples, suggesting that the maladaptive cognitive representations of the self held by highly anxious individuals may explain their feelings of low relationship satisfaction despite receiving high levels of support from their romantic partner (e.g., Erwin, Salter & Purves, 2004; Feeney & Noller, 1990).

However, there are study limitations that may provide some explanation for the low predictive power of attachment, in particular, attachment avoidance. Firstly, the measure of attachment developed for the present study may not accurately capture the nature of later-life familial attachment relationships. While the items used in the original ECR assessing romantic relationships were modified to represent appropriate indicators of familial attachment, it could be argued that the inventory still emphasised high levels of interdependence as an adaptive feature of familial attachment. For example, the need for dependency is regarded as an adaptive attachment function of romantic and early parent-child relationships, represented by items such as “I resent it when my partner/parent spend time away from me”. However, it may be the case that the need for dependency is replaced by greater self-reliance and independence in normative later familial attachments (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004).

For instance, according to Cicirelli (1993, 1998) while the child’s attachment to their parent is maintained in adulthood, their need to develop alternate attachment bonds with a romantic partner and children of their own means that feelings of independence are likely to predominate over a sense of parental dependency. Therefore, Cicirelli suggests that older parents and in particular, adult children may be able to experience feelings of comfort and security through symbolically representing the attachment figure by invoking thoughts or memories of early closeness, internalized shared values, goals and interests. This symbolic representation of contact is periodically reinforced by direct communication with the parent through visits and telephone calls. Thus, the attachment bond between child and parent in later life need not involve the level of physical closeness and dependency present in the early stages of the relationship (Brody, 1985; Shanas, 1979, Troll, 1971). Therefore, there may be a need to develop inventories to assess later-life familial attachment that capture the symbolic aspects of adult filial attachment rather than overt physical need for closeness or dependence characteristic of early parent-child relationships and romantic relationships.

Furthermore, an expanded measure of intergenerational solidarity rather than the six-item measure used in the presented study may have provided a more comprehensive measurement of intergenerational solidarity. While the measure used in the present study has been endorsed in previous research (e.g., Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997) not all the indicator items resulted in highly significant factor loadings in the present study. Therefore, using multiple items to assess the various domains of intergenerational solidarity may have more appropriately captured the nature and variability thought to exist in families’ levels of intergenerational solidarity.

In summary, the present study has highlighted the relevance of filial obligation and attachment as potential motivating factors of adult children and elderly parents’ feelings of intergenerational solidarity. Importantly, the research has demonstrated the differential effects of obligatory and attachment processes across generations. In doing so, the research illustrates the need to explore later parent-child relationship functioning through the collection and examination of intergenerational data rather than merely using data from a single generation as the unit of analysis in family research.

References


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The Mediating Effects of Childhood Anxiety

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Abstract

The aim of this investigation was to explore how parental behaviours might predict children’s anxiety. Forty families (40 mothers, 40 fathers, 20 boys, 20 girls) participated. Children and parents completed a measure of anxiety. Children also completed an interview assessing satisfaction with parental support. Parents completed an interview assessing parents’ effectiveness as support providers. No gender difference was found for children’s and parents’ reported anxiety. It was found that the more similar parents’ and boys’ perceptions of emotional support were and the lower parents’ anxiety was the lower boys’ anxiety. The more satisfied girls felt with their mothers’ and fathers’ support provisions and the more effective mothers and fathers felt as instrumental support providers the higher girls’ anxiety. It was concluded that each parent contributes differentially to boys’ and girls’ anxiety. Too much support may be counterproductive in alleviating girls’ anxiety, whereas boys appear to model parents’ anxious behaviours.

Much is presumed about the development and existence of anxiety in children. One possible explanation of children’s anxiety is related to Attachment Theory. This theory proposes that anxiety is grounded in emotional attachments (Bowlby, 1988). Early attachments becomes internalised and determine how children view and react to their world and others within it. Children who view their world as threatening or undependable may, therefore, develop anxiety (Bowlby, 1988).

A large body of literature has revealed a different pattern of anxiety in boys and girls. Prior, Sanson, Smart and Oberklaid (1999) found that anxiety disorders were more commonly diagnosed in preadolescent girls more than in preadolescent boys. Ollendick and King (1991) demonstrated a gender difference in the source of children’s anxiety and found that boys were more likely than girls to experience fear from direct exposure to feared stimuli and girls were more likely than boys to experience fear from informational sources. Lewinsohn, Gotlib, Lewinsohn, Seeley and Allen (1998) revealed that by age six, twice as many girls as boys had experienced an anxiety disorder. There was a greater prevalence of girls with clinical anxiety than there were boys; however, this gender difference was not apparent in a non-clinical sample of children. It appears, therefore, that a different pattern of anxiety does exist for girls and boys, but explanations of these observed differences are limited, warranting further investigation.

It is of particular importance to examine the parent-child relationship during preadolescence because anxiety has been found to be most common during this stage of childhood development. Furthermore, bonding between parent and child allows children to develop adaptive internal working models and effective coping behaviours (Bowlby, 1988). Dishion (1990) found that positive parent-child relationships tend to produce well-adjusted children and parent-child relationships that lack positive attachment and support may lead to maladaptive and anxious behaviours in children. A growing body of literature reveals that parents of anxious children may be less granting of autonomy, more critical, uncoordinated in their parenting and be over involved in their children’s lives than are parents of non-anxious children (Craske, 2003; MacKinaw-Koons, 2001). Moreover, Shaw (2003) found that males and females have different relationships with their parents. In Shaw’s study the psychological well-being of women was most influenced by the support of their mother during childhood whereas the psychological well being of men was most influenced by the support they received from their father during childhood. These findings demonstrate that parental behaviours play an important role in predicting children’s anxiety. In light of these findings it would be crucial to examine the distinctive parental styles and behaviours that may predict children’s anxiety.

The onset of adolescence brings about a major shift in the parent-child relationship. Meeus (2003) for example, found that during this stage of development the level of peer support increases while the level of parental support decreases. Importantly, it was found that parental support was a better predictor of children’s psychological well-being than peer support despite the increase in the importance of peer support. The changes in the parent-child relationship during the transition from childhood to adolescence are of particular interest. According to Bowlby (1988) the role of parents during this transitional period is that of a waiting role – to be available only when called upon by the child (Bowlby, 1988). Nevertheless, it appears that the parent-child relationship remains the primary context for development into the adolescent years. To this end, attachment
between parent and child during preadolescence warrants investigation. Also an examination of the role that peer influences might play in preadolescent children’s anxiety would be pertinent.

Matthewson (2001) examined the relative contributions that attachment to parents and the quality of peer relationships make to the prediction of anxiety in preadolescent children. Gender differences in children’s anxiety as well as possible gender-specific patterns of anxiety prediction were explored. Results revealed that Mother Attachment was the overriding factor contributing significantly to the prediction of anxiety in both girls and boys. Peer relationships on the other hand, did not feature as a significant predictor of children’s anxiety. Father Attachment contributed somewhat to the prediction of boys’ anxiety, but did not contribute to girls’ anxiety. Matthewson concluded that support by each parent contributes differentially to alleviating boys’ and girls’ anxiety, but mother attachment had the strongest influence on anxiety alleviation in both genders. Matthewson argued that this finding coincides with Attachment Theory, which purports that children with strong parental attachment are less likely to develop anxiety symptoms. Given these findings and the findings of previous research, it would be important to further investigate the differential contributions parents make to the prediction of children’s anxiety.

The aim of the present investigation was to explore the types of support that boys and girls receive from their mother and father and whether these might predict children’s anxiety. It was predicted that the more satisfied children are with their parents’ support provisions and the more effective parents feel as support providers, the lower children’s anxiety would be. Similarly, greater parental anxiety was expected to be associated with greater child anxiety. This study also aimed to further explore the non-significant differences between boys’ and girls’ self-reported anxiety found in Matthewson (2001).

Method

Participants

The participants included 40 children and both their biological parents. The children were aged between 8 and 12 years (M = 9 years 9 months; SD = 1.5). There were 20 boys (M = 9 years 10 months; SD = 1.3) and 20 girls (M = 9 years 8 months; SD = 1.3). Forty fathers (M = 44 years 5 months; SD = 5.7) and 40 mothers (M = 41 years 7 months; SD = 4.3) also took part. The families were recruited from six State primary schools in the Hobart, Tasmania metropolitan area, from parental information letters left at schools. Signed consent forms were required preceding data collection.

Materials

The materials consisted of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (Spielberger, 1973) and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, 1983) to measure children’s and parents’ anxiety respectively. The STAI and STAI-C consist of two separate self-report scales measuring state and trait anxiety. Both scales consist of 20 items each. The State Anxiety Scale pertains to how one feels “right now” and the Trait Anxiety Scale pertains to how one “generally” feels. The STAI is based on a four-point scale and the STAI-C is based on a three-point scale.

To investigate the type of support children received from their parents and the type of support parents provided to their children, a rating technique based on My Family and Friends (Reid, Landesman, Treder & Jaccard, 1989) was used. The Parental Support Effectiveness Rating Scale completed by both parents consisted of 12 questions pertaining to four types of support (emotional, informational, instrumental and companionship) and was based on a six-point scale (0 = not at all to 5 = very much so). The Children’s Support Satisfaction Rating Scale completed by children also consisted of 12 questions pertaining to the four types of support. Both scales provided a measure of how effective parents felt as and how satisfied children were with emotional, informational and instrumental support and companionship.

Procedure

Each parent and child was questioned separately, either face-to-face or over the telephone. Children rated how satisfied they felt when their parents provided them with each type of support and parents rated how effective they felt as support providers. The STAI and STAI-C were also administered during the separate parent and child interviews.

Results

In order to detect any gender differences in children and parents’ anxiety, one-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were performed. The means and standard deviations for children’s and parents’ State and Trait Anxiety are displayed in Table 1. An alpha level of 0.05 was adopted for all analyses.
Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Anxiety Reported by Boys (n=20), Girls (n=20), Fathers (n=40) and Mothers (n=40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Boys M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Girls M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Fathers M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mothers M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SA=State Anxiety and TA=Trait Anxiety.

No significant gender differences were found for the anxiety measures for children or for parents. These results reveal that boys and girls in this sample reported similar levels of anxiety and that their mothers and fathers reported similar levels of anxiety.

In order to investigate the separate contribution each predictor variable might make to the prediction of boys’ and girls’ state and trait anxiety stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted. An index of similarity for parental-child ratings of support was calculated and was used as a predictor variable in a stepwise hierarchical regression analysis. This was calculated by determining the difference between parents’ and their children’s ratings on each of the 4 support scales by subtracting the lowest score from the highest score. The smaller the difference the more similar parents’ and children’s perceptions of support were. Other predictor variables included children’s and parents’ ratings of their perceptions of each of the four types of support (emotional, informational and instrumental and companionship) along with mother and father state and trait anxiety. The outcome variables in this analysis were children’s State and Trait anxiety.

**Significant Anxiety Predictors for Boys (n=20)**

Boy’s and Mother’s Emotional Support Similarity Rating was a significant predictor of boys’ TA at Step 1 ($R^2=.43$, $\beta=.66$). At Step 2 mothers’ TA was a significant predictor of boy’s TA ($\Delta R^2=.13$, $\beta=.68$). Fathers’ TA was a significant predictor of Boys’ TA at Step 3 ($\Delta R^2=.12$, $\beta=.86$).

No significant predictors of boys’ State Anxiety could be identified from the range of predictor variables included in this study.

**Significant Anxiety Predictors for Girls (n=20)**

Fathers’ Informational Support Effectiveness Rating was a significant predictor of girls’ Trait Anxiety at Step 1 ($R^2=.27$, $\beta=.52$). At Step 2 Children’s Satisfaction with Father’s Informational Support Rating was a significant predictor of girls’ TA ($\Delta R^2=.28$, $\beta=.53$). Fathers’ Instrumental Support Effectiveness Rating was a significant predictor of girls’ TA at Step 3 ($\Delta R^2=.14$, $\beta=.40$). At Step 4 Children’s Satisfaction with Mother’s Companionship Rating was a significant predictor of girls’ TA ($\Delta R^2=.08$, $\beta=.35$).

Fathers’ Trait Anxiety was a significant predictor of girls’ SA at Step 1 ($R^2=.24$, $\beta=.49$). At Step 2 Fathers’ Informational Support Effectiveness Rating was a significant predictor of girls’ SA ($\Delta R^2=.31$, $\beta=.60$). At Step 3 Mothers’ Informational Support Effectiveness Rating was a significant predictor of girls SA ($\Delta R^2=.14$, $\beta=.38$).

**Discussion**

The aim of this study was to investigate the types of support boys and girls receive from their mother and father and to examine how these interactions might predict anxiety. It was predicted that the more satisfied children would be with their parents’ support provisions and the more effective parents felt as support providers the lower children’s anxiety would be. Similarly the greater parents’ anxiety would be the greater children’s anxiety would be. On the basis of previous findings it was expected that there would be gender differences in the reported level anxiety, with girls reporting greater anxiety levels than would boys in all measures of anxiety.

The study, however, revealed no significant gender differences in children’s reported level of anxiety in all measures. The absence of a gender difference in the reported level of anxiety does not coincide with much of the previous research (e.g. Walsh, et al., 2004; Prior, et al., 1999; Ollednick and King, 1991). The finding does however coincide with Matthewson (2001) and Lewinsohn et al., (1998) who found no gender difference in children’s reported symptoms of non-clinical anxiety. It may be that there is a point in children’s development where the prevalence of anxiety is similar for boys and girls or the difference only becomes pronounced when it
becomes a clinical problem (e.g. Lewinsohn et al., 1998). Nevertheless this finding needs to be replicated in a larger sample.

While the present study did not find gender differences in the reported level of children’s anxiety a slightly different pattern of anxiety prediction was found for girls and boys. It may, therefore, be the case that a gender difference does not lie in the absolute level of anxiety experienced by children, but the difference is in the pattern of variables that predict boys and girls anxiety. The present findings indicate that both mothers and fathers were influential agents in the prediction of boys’ and girls’ anxiety. For boys, it was found that the more similar parents’ and boys’ perceptions of emotional support were, the lower boys’ trait anxiety was. It was also found that the lower their parents’ trait anxiety was, the lower boys’ trait anxiety was also. In terms of girls’ anxiety the results were surprising and counter-hypothetical. It was expected that there would be an inverse relationship between support received and child anxiety. However, for girls, the more satisfied they felt with their fathers’ informational support, and with their mothers’ companionship, plus the more effective fathers felt as instrumental support providers, the higher girls’ trait anxiety. Furthermore, the more effective mothers felt as informational support providers the higher girls’ state anxiety.

The finding that the more satisfied girls felt with their fathers’ informational support, instrumental support and their mothers’ companionship, and the more effective fathers’ felt as instrumental support providers the higher girls’ trait anxiety is of particular interest. Furthermore, the finding that the more effective mothers felt as informational support providers the higher girls’ state anxiety is also needs some attention. It could be argued that gender-specific patterns of anxiety prediction are due to boys and girls having different internal working models. That is, informational support (information girls learn from parents about the world and themselves in relation to the world) might be providing girls with an internal working model that increases rather than decreases anxiety symptoms. Therefore, there may be a level of informational support that is counter productive in alleviating girls’ anxiety. Boys, however, may be more likely to develop their internal working model through observation of their parents’ behaviour.

Attachment theory proposes that the parent-child relationship is crucial to children’s normal development as it enables children to regulate their behaviour and emotions, and provides children with an internal working model of relationships. Children who view their world as threatening or undependable may, therefore, develop anxiety symptoms (Bowlby, 1988). It may be the case that girls are learning from their parents that their external world is threatening and undependable, whereas boys’ anxiety may be due to an inability to regulate their behaviour and emotions. Boys, therefore, cannot learn how to regulate their emotions from parents who experience difficulty in regulating their emotions. To this end girls’ may be lacking a sense of control over their external world and boys’ may be lacking a sense of control over their internal world. This distinction may account for possible gender differences in children’s anxiety. If this were the case it would be of interest to explore what girls are really learning from their parents about how the world works and how these lessons might be increasing rather than alleviating their anxiety. This finding may also provide further insight into possible causes of the existence of gender differences in anxiety.

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Attachment Relationships and Adolescent Psychological Health: The Influence of Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Research demonstrates that attachment relationships play important roles in adolescent psychological health. The influence of romantic relationships on adjustment is less clear. Using a cross-sectional sample of 515 adolescents, the current study examines whether romantic relationships replace the influence of other attachment relationships on adolescent psychological health. Regression analyses revealed that romantic relationships did not significantly impact on the influence of other attachment relationships when predicting depression but did significantly decrease the influence of peer attachment for self-esteem. It is concluded that romantic relationships during adolescence do not have major direct effects on adjustment and have only a minor influence on existing attachment relationships in predicting psychological health. Findings are discussed in the light of the continuity model of interpersonal relationships.

Although a topic of considerable interest in popular culture, the study of adolescent romantic relationships from a psychological perspective has been relatively neglected. While the relative importance of parental attachment, peer attachment and close friendship in the prediction of adolescent psychological health have been the subject of debate (Wilkinson, 2004a), relatively few researchers have investigated adolescent romantic relationships in the context of existing attachment relationships. It has been argued that adolescent romantic relationships represent one of the most important developmental tasks of adolescence (Furman & Wehner, 1997). However, it is not clearly understood what influence adolescent romantic relationships have on other attachment relationships or on psychological health.

During late adolescence close dyadic relationships such as intimate friendships and romantic relationships develop. Research has suggested that these close intimate bonds share many features with attachment relationships. Ainsworth (1989) argued that under certain circumstances these intimate relationships may be classified as attachments. In one of the few studies in the area, Buhrmester (1990) found that the intimacy of friendships was consistently related to adjustment and interpersonal competence during adolescence and that adolescents who characterised their intimate friendships as compassionate, disclosing, and satisfying reported less depression and higher levels of self-esteem.

Researchers have argued that romantic relationships are a key developmental task and the failure to establish a romantic relationship during adolescence is thought to have adverse consequences for the individual (Collins, 2003). These relationships are unlike adult romantic relationships, however, in that they tend to be short-term and do not involve the same level of commitment, exclusivity, attachment and care-giving (Brown, Feiring, & Furman, 1999). While the adult romantic relationship literature has found that long-term romantic relationships are associated with stability, security and relationship satisfaction (Feeney, 1999), it is unclear whether long-term romantic relationships in adolescents are associated with such positive outcomes (Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engels, & Meeus, 2001).

In contrast to the asserted developmental importance of romantic relationships in adolescence, studies that consider their impact on psychological health are limited and contradictory. Some research has demonstrated that romantic relationships are associated with increased social competence and self-esteem and are an important source of emotional support and commitment for adolescents (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 1999). However, other studies report that romantic involvement during adolescence is related to more depressive symptoms (Davilla, Steinberg, Kachadorian, Cobb, & Fincham, 2004) and behavioural and academic problems (Neeman, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995). Moreover, a higher number of romantic partners during adolescence has been linked to higher levels of externalising behaviours, and poor emotional health and academic performance (Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins, 2001).

Research investigating the links between romantic involvement and peer attachment in psychological health has been limited. Brendgen, Vitaro, Doyle, Markieqicz, and Bukowski (2002) found that being involved in a romantic relationship was related to poorer emotional and behavioural adjustment, but only for those adolescents with inadequate peer relationships. For adolescents who had adequate peer relationships, romantic involvement was not related to emotional and behavioural adjustment. They suggested that adolescents who are unable to establish stable and successful peer relationships lack the social skills necessary for positive social interaction in
romantic relationships. Thus, while romantic relationships may be an indicator for normative and adaptive
development, the effects of romantic relationships on adjustment may depend on whether or not adolescents
have established successful peer relationships. However, a further explanation for the interaction between
romantic relationships and peer relationships may be that the functions of attachment are transferring from peers
to romantic partners in the prediction of adolescent adjustment (Wilkinson & Sarandrea, 2005).

Research investigating the links between adolescent romantic involvement and parental attachment in the
prediction of psychological health has also been limited. Overbeek, and colleagues (2003) found that parental
attachment was differentially associated with emotional disturbance in groups of adolescents with and without
romantic relationships. Specifically, the links between parental attachment and emotional disturbance were less
strong for adolescents in a romantic relationship than adolescents not in a romantic relationship. The authors
argue that the influence of parental attachment diminishes in late adolescence due to romantic relationships
becoming the basic source of support and intimacy.

The Present Study

The aim of this study is to investigate whether being involved in a romantic relationship during adolescence
decreases the influence of parental attachment, peer attachment and intimate friendships in the prediction of
psychological health. It is well established in the attachment literature that the quality of parental and peer
attachment is important in adolescent psychological health. This research has demonstrated considerable support
for the 'continuity/cognitive' model of interpersonal relationships, such that parental attachment, peer attachment
and intimate friendships play complimentary and cumulative roles in adolescent adjustment. However, recent
research from Overbeek and colleagues (2003) and Brendgen et al. (2002) suggest that the influence of parental
and peer attachment in the prediction of adolescent psychological health is moderated by the existence of a
romantic relationship. These findings provide support for the 'competition' model of interpersonal relationships
by suggesting that romantic relationships may supplant existing attachment relationships in the prediction of
adolescent psychological health.

Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that involvement in a romantic relationship will decrease the
influence of mother, father, and peer attachment in the prediction of adolescent psychological health. Further,
previous research has failed to examine whether involvement in a romantic relationship decreases the influence
of close friendships in the prediction of adolescent psychological health. Intimate friendships are considered to
be important for adolescent psychological health (Buhrmester, 1990) and are thought to operate in a similar way
to attachment relationships with parents and peers. Thus, it is hypothesised that involvement in a romantic
relationship will also decrease the influence of intimate friendships in the prediction of adolescent psychological
health.

Method

Participants

A cross-sectional sample of 515 volunteer high school students from the Australian Capital Territory aged
between 15 and 19 years (Mean = 17.2, SD = 7.34) participated in the study. Of this sample, 398 were female
(77.3%) and 117 (22.7%) were male. The sample included 192 (37.3%) participants who were currently involved
in a romantic relationship and 323 (62.7%) who were not. Based on parental occupation, the majority of
participants (74.8%) were from families classified as middle socio-economic status.

Procedure and Measures

Parental and individual consent was obtained for all participants before they took part in the research. In a
classroom setting participants completed a self-report questionnaire booklet containing several measures. A
debriefing was conducted for participants after the questionnaire was administered.

The thirteen item Secure subscale of the Adolescent Friendship Attachment Scale (AFAS-S: Wilkinson,
2004b) was used to measure the quality of friendship attachment. Participants were asked to consider the friend
they are closest to and indicate on a 5-point scale the extent to which they agree or disagree with several
statements. Examples include “when I have a bad day my friend cheers me up” and “I like the closeness I share
with my friend”. Internal consistency for the AFAS-S was high (α = 0.91).

Quality of attachment to mothers, fathers, and peers was measured using a modified 45-item version of the
Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA: Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Fifteen items separately
assessed father, mother and peer attachment quality. Respondents rated each item using a 5-point scale ranging
from “almost never or never” (1) to “always or almost always” (5) to indicate the degree to which the items were
true. Internal consistency of the 15-item measures was similar to Armsden and Greenberg (1987) (Mother
Attachment α = 0.94; Father Attachment α = 0.94; Peer Attachment α = 0.89).

Psychological health was assessed with separate depression and self-esteem scales. For the ten item
Depression Scale (Wilkinson, 2004a) participants were asked to rate, on a 3-point scale, how often they had
experienced each item in the last month for a range of typical symptoms. Examples include “I’ve felt hopeless about the future” and “I’ve felt unhappy or sad”. The scale has good internal consistency (α = 0.83). Self-esteem was measured using the eight item Tafarodie and Swann (2001) Self-Liking Scale Revised (SL-R). Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point scale how they feel about themselves while reading several statements. Examples include “I tend to under-rate myself” and “I have a negative attitude towards myself”. Internal consistency for this scale was adequate (α = .80).

The status of romantic relationship was assessed using a single item: “do you currently have a boyfriend or girlfriend?”.

Results

Prior to analysis, variables were screened for accuracy of data entry, missing values and assumptions of multivariate analysis. Eight univariate outliers were changed to one score above or below the next non-outlying score in the corresponding distribution. No multivariate outliers were identified. The sample included 192 participants (37.3%) involved in a romantic relationship and 323 participants (62.7%) who were not. Those currently in a relationship were significantly older ($M = 17.30, SD = 0.63$ versus $M = 17.15, SD = 0.60$), $t(513) = 2.71, p < .01$, and had higher friendship attachment ($M = 61.99, SD = 7.28$ versus $M = 59.25, SD = 7.52$), $t(513) = 4.14, p < .001$, than those not in a relationship. There were no significant differences between the groups on any of the other variables of interest.

Table 1
Multiple Regression for Depression and Self-Esteem: Main Effects and Interaction Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Self-Liking</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-0.0122*</td>
<td>-0.122*</td>
<td>0.254**</td>
<td>0.261**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Attachment</td>
<td>-0.336**</td>
<td>-0.273</td>
<td>0.326**</td>
<td>0.326**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Attachment</td>
<td>-0.155*</td>
<td>-0.363*</td>
<td>0.221**</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Attachment</td>
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<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.149*</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend Attachment</td>
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<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.164</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
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<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer X Relationship</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.060</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.312*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother X Relationship</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.217</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father X Relationship</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.199</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.170</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend X Relationship</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.170</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Depression - Main Effects Model $R^2 = .22$, Interaction Model $R^2 = .22$; Self-Liking - Main Effects Model $R^2 = .27$, Interaction Model $R^2 = .28$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Multiple regression analyses with interaction effects were performed to investigate whether romantic relationship status decreased the influence of attachment relationships in the prediction of depression and self-esteem. Data were divided into two groups: those in a romantic relationship and those not in a romantic relationship (Relationship Status). The statistical models were composed of main effect predictor variables (Peer, Mother, Father, and Friend Attachment, and Relationship Status) and the multiplicative interaction terms (Peer Attachment X Relationship Status, Mother Attachment X Relationship Status, Father Attachment X Relationship Status, and Friend Attachment X Relationship Status). The procedure recommended by Jaccard, Turrisi, and Wan (1990) for assessing interactions in regression was employed and variables were centred to improve any impact of multicollinearity. Initial main effects models were examined prior to the final model which included both main effects and interaction terms. Sex and Age were also entered as controls.
The results of the main effects analysis for Depression are presented in Table 1 and indicate that Depression was significantly predicted by Sex, $t(474) = -2.84, p < .01$, Peer Attachment $t(474) = -6.91, p < .001$, Mother Attachment, $t(474) = -3.45, p < .01$, and Father Attachment, $t(474) = -4.26, p < .001$. Overall, this model accounted for 22% of the variance. Table 1 also presents the results of the interaction analysis. Examination of final $\beta$ weights indicates no significant interactions between any of the variables of interest when predicting Depression.

The results of the main effects analysis for Self-Esteem are presented in Table 1 and show that it was significantly predicted by Sex, $t(474) = 6.16, p < .001$, Peer Attachment $t(474) = 6.97, p < .001$, Mother Attachment $t(474) = 5.09, p < .001$, and Father Attachment $t(474) = 3.51, p < .001$. Overall, this model accounted for 27% of the variation in Self-Esteem. The results for the interaction analysis are also presented in Table 1. There was a significant interaction between Peer Attachment and Relationship Status, $t(481) = -2.25, p < .05$. This suggests that the influence of peer attachment changes as a function of romantic relationship status. There were no statistically significant interactions for any of the other variables of interest. Overall, the set of variables accounted for 28% of the variance.

In order to assist in the interpretation of the interaction between Peer Attachment and Relationship Status in the prediction of Self-Esteem an examination of the separate $\beta$ weights across Relationship Status was undertaken. Although the $\beta$ weight for Peer Attachment is significant in both models, it is significantly higher in the model for adolescents with no romantic relationship ($\beta = .399$) than in the model for those who were in a romantic relationship ($\beta = .229$), Fisher $Z = 1.99, p < .05$.

Discussion

Overall, the hypothesis that involvement in a romantic relationship decreases either the quality of attachment relationships or their role in adolescent psychological health was not supported, with the exception of one finding. The involvement in a romantic relationship did decrease the influence of peer attachment in the prediction of self-esteem. However, it did not decrease the influence of either parental attachment or intimate friendship. Moreover, involvement in a romantic relationship did not decrease the influence of parental attachment, peer attachment, or intimate friendship in the prediction of depression.

A preliminary aim of this study was to explore whether attachment relationships and psychological health outcomes vary across romantic relationship status. Attachment relationships with parents and peers remained stable. This finding is inconsistent with recent research suggesting that adolescent involvement in a romantic relationship places strain on existing relationships and leads to a decline in the quality of peer attachment (Brown et al., 1999). The current study suggests that romantic relationships in adolescence do not occur at the expense of existing relationships with parents or peers. With regard to secure intimate friendships, adolescents who were involved in a romantic relationship did maintain greater security than those not in such a relationship. This finding may reflect the fact that adolescents who have already established romantic relationships have the necessary intimacy skills required to maintain both a romantic relationship and close friendships (Brendgen et al., 2002). In contrast, adolescents not involved in romantic relationships may be at a different developmental stage and lack the skills necessary to establish a romantic relationship and maintain quality intimate friendships.

The present study confirms a number of previous findings regarding the direct role of attachment relationships in adolescent psychological health. Lower levels of mother, father and peer attachment were associated with increased depression and decreased self-esteem and this is consistent with previous research (Wilkinson & Walford, 2001; Wilkinson, 2004a). These findings highlight the continuing importance of both parental and peer relationships in adolescent psychological health and support the continuity model of interpersonal relationships in that both parental and peer relationships operate in cumulative and complementary ways and are associated with lower levels of psychological distress and increased self-confidence.

Secure intimate friendship was not significantly associated with either depression or self-esteem. This is contrary to previous research implicating the role of quality of intimate friendships in adolescent depression (Buhrmester, 1990). This finding is also in contrast to the direct effects of peer and parental attachment and suggests that secure intimate friendships may have a different function separate from other relationships. Secure intimate friendships typically provide a context for greater self-disclosure and intimacy about emotional and social problems. While adolescents with secure intimate friendships may utilise these relationships for such self-disclosure, adolescents with less secure intimate friendships may be utilising peers or parents as providers of close emotional support.

Similar to the case for close friendships, romantic relationships had no impact on either depression or self-esteem in the context of the other relationship variables. While a number of recent studies have demonstrated that involvement in a romantic relationship is associated with greater depressive symptoms (Davilla et al., 2004), this study suggests that adolescent involvement in a romantic relationship has neither malign nor beneficial effects on psychological health. Importantly, and contrary to predictions, there was little evidence to support the interactive effect of romantic relationship status on the role of attachment relationships in psychological health. Whether predicting depression or self-esteem, parental attachment and peer attachment had similar effects regardless of whether the adolescent was in a romantic relationship. This would suggest that the establishment of
new relationships during adolescence, such as close intimate friendships or romantic relationships, do not occur at the expense of existing relationships with parents and peers. To this end, the concern of many parents that their own relationship and their child’s peer relationships may suffer as a result of a romantic relationship, may be alleviated with the knowledge that romantic relationships develop, not to the detriment of other existing relationships with parents or peers, but in a network of existing complimentary relationships.

A key finding was the interaction between peer attachment and romantic relationship status in the prediction of self-esteem. It may be concluded that self-esteem is more dependent on peer relationships within an adolescent network than in such a relationship. This finding is consistent with Brendgen and colleagues (2002) and suggests that perhaps there is some form of transfer of attachment occurring from peer relationships to romantic relationships, particularly with regard to the adolescents self-concept. Nevertheless, the overall results are consistent with literature suggesting that adolescent romantic relationships are transitory and lack the social and emotional depth to be considered significant relationships (Brown et al., 1999). Perhaps, as argued by some researchers, adolescent romantic relationships are simply a context for learning about different facets of sexuality and increasing one’s status in the peer group (Furman & Shaffer, 2003).

There are a number of suggestions for future research and limitations of this study that need to be addressed. Firstly, a relatively small number of participants were involved in a romantic relationship and this lead to the decision to dichotomise the Relationship Status variable. Future research should look at increasing the sample size of this group so that it becomes viable to look at the length of romantic relationship on the outcome variables. There is some evidence to suggest that there is an ‘optimal’ length of romantic relationships in adolescence and that longer term romantic relationships may be problematic in this developmental period. The imbalance of female and male participant numbers in this study is also not ideal and a more balanced distribution would enable an examination of sex differences. Future research would also benefit from longitudinal studies which would enable researchers to investigate how individual attachment relationships change and interact with romantic relationships overtime.

Conclusions

The current study investigated whether involvement in a romantic relationship decreased the influence of attachment relationships in the prediction of adolescent psychological health. Involvement in a romantic relationship did not play a significant role in directly predicting psychological health outcomes or as a moderator in decreasing the influence of attachment relationships in predicting psychological health outcomes. The findings provide support for the continuity model of interpersonal relationships by highlighting the importance of attachment relationships with parents and peers and the complementary, cumulative ways in which these relationships influence adolescent psychological health. While popular culture’s interest in adolescent romance has heightened the focus on such relationships, this study suggests that relationships with parents and peers are more important to adolescent psychological health than adolescent romantic relationships.

References


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Friendships at Work, Job Type and Needs: The Impact on Organisational Outcomes

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Abstract

A previously supported model of workplace friendships and organisational outcomes (Morrison, 2004) is assessed to investigate whether there are individual differences in the impact of friendships at work. Individuals from diverse backgrounds and industries responded to an Internet-based survey (n=445). The model under test was cross-validated and was found to be invariant across groups reporting differing needs for affiliation, autonomy or achievement, but non-invariant across groups reporting occupying relatively less or more interdependent jobs. Results suggest that the interdependence of individuals’ jobs affects the salience of opportunities for friendships more than subjective needs.

Numerous close friendships evolve from existing formal relationships in workplaces and, for many people, these friendships are maintained within the organisational setting. Previous research has supported the notion that increased friendship opportunities at work impact positively on organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and reduce employees’ intention to leave an organisation (Morrison, 2003, 2004; Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000; Richer, Blanchard, & Vallerand, 2002; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995). However, the impact of personal needs and job type on the linkages between workplace friendships and organisational outcomes are enquiries that have yet to receive empirical attention. None of the studies cited above have examined whether there are individual differences in the way measured variables relate to one another, or whether people differ in terms of how they respond to friendships at work. Highlighting when and for whom friendships at work are most salient should lead to insights into the application of relationship research to the work environment.

The current study builds on earlier findings, which have shed light on the relationship between workplace friendship and turnover, organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Morrison, 2004). It was on the basis of four variables (interdependence of work role and needs for affiliation, autonomy and achievement) that the sample in the current study was divided and tested for group invariance in a previously supported model of workplace friendships (Morrison, 2004).

Needs for Affiliation, Autonomy and Achievement

Needs for affiliation, autonomy and achievement are examined in the current study, and are defined by Heckert et al (2000) as follows; the need for affiliation is the desire to interact socially and to be accepted by others, the need for autonomy is the desire for self rather than other direction, and the need for achievement is the desire to accomplish difficult tasks, maintain high standards and work toward distant goals.

It is useful to consider the interactions between personal dispositions and the environment when examining the effects on organisational outcomes. Individuals whose work experiences are compatible with their personal dispositions (i.e. provide fulfilment of needs) should have a more positive experience of work than those whose work experiences are less compatible with their needs (Meyer & Allen, 1991). That is to say, that the same work environment might engender differing levels of satisfaction or commitment in employees, depending on their differing needs. Research in Germany into the influence of achievement and affiliation variables on work motivation and job satisfaction suggests that needs for affiliation and achievement, and the degree to which these needs are met have a significant influence on employees’ experience of work (Pifczyk & Kleinbeck, 2000).

A particular type of work experience (in this instance, having a friendly workplace) will probably influence commitment and/or satisfaction only among employees for whom it is relevant (for example, those reporting high needs for affiliation). Thus it is likely that people who report high needs for affiliation will be relatively more affected by a lack of friends at work while, for those reporting relatively high needs for autonomy, workplace friendships will have less salience.

Interdependence of Work Role

It is possible that the salience of informal relationships will vary, depending not only on personal characteristics, but also on job type. For the purposes of this investigation the level of interdependence in an individual’s job is conceptualised to be on a continuum from very interdependent to very autonomous. It is likely that for individuals who report requiring regular communication and interaction with colleagues in order to fulfil
In an academic context Winstead et al. (1995) found that the effects of relationship factors (in this case maintenance difficulty) on job satisfaction were only apparent for general staff (as opposed to faculty members). Thus it seems likely that the type of work an individual does will interact with the impact of friendships at work, with relationships being generally more salient for jobs which are relatively more interdependent.

**Model of Organisational Relationships**

The causal model of organisational relationships tested in the current study was first proposed by Morrison (2003; 2004). Morrison (2004) proposed a theoretical model, holding that friendships at work would have measurable relationships with organisational outcomes (satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover). Not all of the hypothesised paths in the model were supported however, as the relationship between friendship opportunities and organisational commitment was found to be mediated by satisfaction. Figure 1 illustrates the model of the relationships between friendships at work and organisational outcomes, which was supported by the data in Morrison (2004), and is cross-validated here. The regression paths shown are those for the data in the current study; all paths are significant ($p < .05$).

The friendship opportunities variable is correlated with cohesion, and antecedent to both job satisfaction and organisational commitment, both of which, in turn, impact on intention to leave. The model also shows friendship opportunities as antecedent to the prevalence of friendships at work. This model supports both the earlier study (Morrison, 2004) and previous research in this area (e.g., Nielsen et al., 2000; Richer et al., 2002; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995).

Although some previous researchers in this area (e.g. Richer et al., 2002; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995) have used Structural Equation Modelling to ascertain probable causal relations between variables, they seldom cross-validate their findings to address problems associated with post-hoc model fitting: specifically the risk that post hoc model modification may be driven by characteristics of the particular sample on which the model was tested (Byrne, 2001) and fits some idiosyncrasy of the data set rather than reflecting true relationships between variables.

In addition, and most central to the current study, the question remains of whether the proposed model is invariant across individuals from sub groups of the surveyed population. The present study addresses these limitations and proposes a model comprising empirically grounded variables, testing the directional influence of the variables within one framework. Specifically the purposes of the study are to: (a) cross-validate the previously supported model across independent samples from within the full sample, and (b) test for the invariance of the specified model across those who report working in relatively less or more interdependent jobs, and those who report relatively greater and lesser needs for affiliation, autonomy and achievement.

**Method**

**Participants**

Four hundred and forty-five individuals responded to the questionnaire. Respondents ranged from 19 to 64 years in age, with a mean age of 35 years (s.d. = 11.07). Women made up 68.9% of the sample. The largest reported industry/sector respondents reported working in was tertiary education (92 respondents) followed by health care (53 respondents). Respondents were primarily from Western countries but the international mix gives the findings wider generalisability than previous studies, using only American respondents (e.g. Nielsen et al., 2000; Richer et al., 2002; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995; Winstead et al., 1995). Respondents were from almost every type of occupation, from medical doctors, to academics, to cleaning staff, to police.
Materials

Data were gathered using a self-administered, Internet-based questionnaire. The instruments and survey questions used to test the model include the Workplace Friendship Scale (Nielsen et al., 2000), the Workgroup Cohesion Scale (Campion, Medsker, & Higgs, 1993), the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), the Job Satisfaction Scale (Warr, Cook, & Wall, 1979), and a measure of turnover intention (Mobley, 1977). Also included in the survey were two interdependence questions (“In order to fulfil my duties at work, regular communication and/or interaction with my colleagues is important” and “The type of work I do can be done satisfactorily on my own, without regular interaction and/or communication with my colleagues”) and the Needs Assessment Questionnaire (Heckert et al., 2000), which were used to divide the sample and test for group invariance.

Procedure

Acquaintances of the author and two email lists (EMONET and IOnet) were sent an email inviting them to complete an online questionnaire, which included a link to the data collection site (www.studentresearcher.com). Once 445 people had submitted their responses to a database through the Internet data-collection site, the data were downloaded and used to create the measurement models of the scales and test the theoretical model.

Analysis and Results

Analyses were based on the AMOS (Arbuckle, 1999) program, and were conducted in six stages. First, measurement models of the scales used to measure the latent variables, derived from Morrison (2004), were confirmed (fit for each measurement model was adequate). Second, the data were assessed for goodness of fit to the proposed model (again, the data was a good fit to the model). Third, the data were randomly split into two (using the ‘select random sample of cases’ function in SPSS), to form calibration (n= 230) and validation (n=215) samples. Fourth, the calibration sample was assessed for goodness of fit to the proposed model. Fifth, the model was cross-validated by testing for the invariance of all causal paths across the second independent sample. This procedure is outlined by Byrne (2001) and involves first performing an omnibus test, with no equality constraints imposed, determining the goodness of fit for the two groups in combination. Having constrained the structural paths to be equal across groups it is possible to compare the constrained model with the initial multi group model, in which no equality constraints were imposed, to determine if the causal structure is invariant. The change in chi-square value ($\Delta \chi^2$) provides the basis for comparison with the initial multi group model. Finally, respondents were divided into groups using median splits, and the validated model was then used to test for invariance between individuals who reported having relatively less ($n = 201$) and more ($n = 244$) interdependent work roles, those who indicated high ($n = 238$) versus low ($n = 207$) needs for affiliation, those who reported high ($n = 268$) versus low ($n = 177$) needs for autonomy and those who reported high ($n = 236$) versus low ($n = 209$) needs for achievement.

Assessment of model fit was based on multiple criteria, reflecting statistical, theoretical and practical considerations (Byrne, 2001). The indices used in the current study these were (a) the Chi-square ($\chi^2$) likelihood ratio statistic, (b) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI: Bentler, 1990), and (c) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA: Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The $\chi^2$ value divided by the degrees of freedom should be below 5 to indicate good fit (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998), while CFI values greater than .90 indicate good fit (Byrne, 1994, 2001). RMSEA values less than .08 indicate reasonable fit, and less than .05 indicate good fit.

Pedhazur (1982) points out that there have been numerous articles, both criticising existing indices and proposing new ones. Although there is little agreement about the value of various fit indices, Pedhazur states that there does seem to be unanimity that no single fit index should be relied upon; several indices should be considered in the assessment of model fit.

Comparing Groups: Calibration Compared to Validation Sample

For the purpose of cross-validation, the hypothesised model was tested for its replication across two independent, random samples, i.e., the calibration and validation groups (Byrne, 2001). The calibration sample showed adequate fit to the model (CFI = .89, RMSEA = .05). From an omnibus test, which determines the goodness of fit for the two groups in combination, and with no equality constraints imposed, the fit is adequate; although the CFI is slightly below the criteria for good fit (CFI = .88) the other two indices indicate good fit of the data to the model, (RMSEA = .04, $\chi^2/(1234) = 2214.8$, $\chi^2/df = 1.82$). Next, to test for invariance across groups, equality constraints were specified by labelling all parameters in the model equal across the two groups. The change in chi-square with 44 degrees of freedom is 48.5 ($\Delta \chi^2/(44) = 48.5$). Since this test statistic is not statistically significant, the model is shown to be invariant across the two groups (refer appendix 1).
Comparing Groups: Needs for Affiliation, Autonomy and Achievement

The invariance-testing strategy described above was then used to test for the invariance of the causal structure for respondents reporting relatively high versus low needs for affiliation autonomy and achievement. The differences in chi-square values ($\Delta \chi^2$) between the second tests and the omnibus tests were not statistically significant ($\Delta \chi^2(44) = 44.5$, $\Delta \chi^2(44) = 48.7$ and $\Delta \chi^2(44) = 54.1$ for the affiliation, autonomy and achievement group comparisons respectively). Thus, reported needs seem not to influence the way the variables in the tested model (refer figure 1) relate to each other.

Comparing Groups: Interdependence of Work Role

The same invariance testing strategy was then used to test for the invariance of structural paths across groups of respondents who reported having comparatively less or more interdependent jobs. From the omnibus test, the goodness of fit of the model for the two groups in combination, and with no equality constraints imposed, is adequate. Again the CFI is slightly lower than would be desired for good fit but the other indices indicate a good fit of the data to the model (CFI = .88, RMSEA = .044, $\chi^2(1234) = 22291.7$, $\chi^2/df = 1.86$). Having constrained all parameters to be equal across groups, the results were compared with the initial multi group model. The change in chi-square with 44 degrees of freedom is 95.5 ($\Delta \chi^2(44) = 95.5$), which is statistically significant ($p < .001$); this indicates that the fit of the data to the model is noninvariant across the two groups (i.e., those reporting having (a) relatively less and (b) relatively more interdependent jobs).

Given this finding of noninvariance, the next task is to locate the nonequivalent parameters in the model. This process involves a series of logically ordered tests for invariance, first testing for the equivalence of the factor structure and then for the equivalence of the structural model. By doing this, it is possible to determine which parameters in the model are different between those in relatively less and more interdependent jobs. Appendix 2 shows the results bearing on this series of tests for invariance. Each model tested is compared to the baseline model. A significant change in Chi-square between the model tested and the baseline model indicates that the two are noninvariant (i.e., significantly different).

Once the noninvariance of a model has been established the next step is to test for the equivalence of the factor-loading pattern across the two groups. The third line in Appendix 2 shows the result of this test. The significantly different Chi-square indicates that not all factor loadings are invariant across groups. A noninvariant factor-loading pattern necessitates the use of partial measurement invariance in testing for the equality of regression paths and covariances (which are the parameters of interest in this case). The noninvariant items were found to be item 8 of the cohesion scale, item 4 of the workplace friendship scale and item 6 of the organisational commitment questionnaire. When the full model is tested for invariance, allowing only the three scale items identified as being noninvariant to be freely estimated, there was no longer significant difference in the factor structure (as shown in line 4 of Appendix 2). The invariance of the regression paths and covariances (the parameters of interest) across high and low interdependence groups can now be tested. To do this, it is necessary to test for the invariance of each parameter individually, while continuing to hold constrained all parameters found to be cumulatively invariant across the two groups.

On testing for the invariance of the covariance between friendship opportunities and cohesion (social support), the change in chi-square ($\Delta \chi^2(160) = 28.8$) was significant (Model 11, Appendix 2). Thus, this parameter is noninvariant (different) across the two groups. The equality constraint for the covariance between friendship opportunities and cohesion (social support) was therefore released for all subsequent models, none of which resulted in a significant change in Chi-square (refer lines 12-18, Appendix 2).

To sum up, the tests of invariance shown in Appendix 2 indicated that there was one main difference in the structural relations among the variables measured in the current study. Other than a single item in each of three measurement models, the factor-structure related to the measurement models is equivalent across the two groups. There are, however, significant group differences with respect to the covariance between friendship opportunities and the social support aspect of cohesion.

The correlation between the cohesion (social support) and friendship opportunity variables were $r = .37$ and $r = .63$ for the high and low interdependence groups respectively. Although both correlations are statistically significant, the analyses described above indicate that they are significantly different. It seems that the relationship between cohesion (social support) and friendship opportunities is significantly stronger for the low interdependence group. This implies that, for those in relatively less interdependent (more autonomous), jobs there is a stronger relationship between the social support aspect of cohesion and opportunities for friendship than there is for those in more interdependent jobs.

Finally the indices of fit were compared for the low and high interdependence groups. The non-equivalence of the causal structure suggests that the model may be better fitting for one group compared to another. For the high interdependence group the CFI (.90) and the RMSEA (.058) both meet the criteria for a well fitting model, while for the low interdependence group the CFI (.85), does not meet the criteria for good fit (i.e., >.9), the RMSEA too, is higher than for the high interdependence group (RMSEA = .067), suggesting that the data fit the
model less well. These results indicate that the causal model, showing the impact of workplace friends on organisational outcomes, is better fitting for those in highly interdependent work roles.

**Discussion**

The model was found to be invariant across two groups when the data was randomly divided, thereby cross-validating the model. Findings also indicate invariance in the causal model when the samples compared were divided on the basis of needs for affiliation autonomy or achievement. These are somewhat unexpected findings, given that it seems reasonable to expect that data gathered from individuals with high needs for affiliation and autonomy, particularly, would differentially fit a causal model of friendships compared to those reporting relatively lower needs.

A possible explanation for these unexpected findings may be that individuals expressing higher order needs are having them fulfilled outside the workplace. This relates to the concept of “compensation” from the work-family balance literature (Campbell-Clark, 2001; Lambert, 1990; Sumer & Knight, 2001). For example, if employees expressing high needs for affiliation have their needs met at home, they may be less likely seek to fulfil them at work; thus the absence of friends at work will be unlikely to be any less or more salient for these individuals, than for colleagues who have low needs for affiliation.

The model was non-invariant (different) across the two groups reporting having relatively less or more interdependent jobs. Indices of fit indicated that data from respondents in relatively more interdependent jobs fit the causal model of friendships and organisational outcomes better than data collected from individuals in more autonomous jobs. The finding that the correlation between friendship opportunities and the social support aspect of cohesion is stronger for those who report being in relatively less interdependent jobs seems somewhat counterintuitive. A possible explanation is that those in very interdependent jobs will have opportunities for friendship regardless of the perceived cohesion in their workplace (so a significant correlation will not be found) while those in very autonomous jobs will only experience increased opportunities for friendship if they also perceive themselves to be socially supported by their colleagues.

When the findings of group invariance between those with high and low needs are considered alongside the finding that the model was noninvariant when the sample was divided on the basis of the level of interdependence of individual’s work roles an interesting pattern emerges. It seems that the degree of interdependence in an individual’s job influences the relationships between the measured variables, while the subjective needs of employees for autonomy, affiliation and achievement will not. Findings that the model (featuring friendship opportunities as antecedent to organisational outcomes such as commitment and job satisfaction) is better fitting for those in interdependent jobs is consistent with the notion that those in interdependent jobs will be more affected by friendship opportunities than those in autonomous jobs, and also with prior research by Winstead et al. (1995). Thus, it seems that the actual job someone does, and whether or not it is necessary to work with others in order to perform one’s job, will affect the salience of informal interpersonal relationships at work, while whether or not individuals self-report having needs for autonomy and affiliation, will not.

**Conclusion**

This study cross-validated a model of friendships in the workplace, and results suggest that the proposed model is robust, evidenced by the invariance of the model on four out of five tests for invariance. In addition, the findings demonstrate that there is a difference between those occupying relatively less or more interdependent jobs in terms of how the variables in the model relate to each other.

It was found that the correlation between social support and friendship opportunities is significantly stronger for those in less interdependent jobs. A likely explanation for this finding is that, for those who report being in highly interdependent work roles, friendship opportunities will exist regardless of the reported group cohesion. For those in very autonomous work roles, on the other hand, friendship opportunities will probably be more dependent on the perceived social support in the work environment.

In addition, findings suggest that the relationship between opportunities for friendships in the workplace and job satisfaction, organisational commitment and intention to leave are not the same for all employees. While it makes logical sense that having more friends at work will make one’s work day more pleasant, it seems that, in terms of organisational outcomes, friendships have less impact on those in relatively more autonomous jobs (evidenced by the relatively poor fit of the model for this group). This finding supports that of Fine (1986), who claims that those in occupations with relatively more autonomy will have less need for close relationships with their peers. Second, it seems that the reported needs of employees for affiliation, autonomy or achievement do not really affect the relationships between measured variables; regardless of respondents’ reported needs, the impact of friends in the workplace remained considerable.
Limitations

There are limitations inherent in using the internet as a means of data collection. The sampling is non-random and there will be sampling bias in the responses. Only those individuals with computer access can respond and there is no way to calculate the response rate, as it is impossible to know how many people saw the survey and chose not to complete it. Self-selection bias within this study means that individuals who have a vested interest in the subject may be more likely to respond.

A second limitation is that the sample was divided for the invariance tests using median splits. This is not ideal as, if there are a lot of mid-range responses, the differences between the two groups may be hidden. Splitting the data into quartiles and comparing only the upper and lower quartiles may have produced different results. This was not done due to the sample size but is a direction for future research, perhaps with a larger sample.

References


**Appendix 1**

*Chi-square Statistics for Tests of Invariance across Sub Groups of the Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal friendship model</th>
<th>Omnibus test / baseline model (no equality constraints imposed)</th>
<th>Comparative model (Factor loadings, variances and covariances constrained equal)</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta$df</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Random sample</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 1234 2214.8</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 1278 2263.3</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High versus low</td>
<td>Affiliation needs</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 1234 2238.3</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High versus low</td>
<td>Autonomy needs</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 1234 2279.5</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High versus low</td>
<td>Achievement needs</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 1234 2359.0</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High versus low interdependence of job</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 1234 2291.7</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 1278 2387.2</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>$p &lt; .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Goodness of Fit Statistics for Tests of Invariance across Those in Relatively Less and More Interdependent Jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model number</th>
<th>Model description</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta df$</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Combined baseline models, high versus low interdependence of job (Model 1)</td>
<td>2291.7</td>
<td>1234</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Factor loadings, variables, regression paths and covariances constrained equal</td>
<td>2387.2</td>
<td>1278</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Only factor loadings constrained equal</td>
<td>2358.6</td>
<td>1263</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>All factor loadings constrained equal other than item 4 (workplace friendship), item 8 (cohesion) and item 6 (OCQ) which were freely estimated.</td>
<td>2326.9</td>
<td>1260</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>As 4 but with variables constrained equal also</td>
<td>2330.2</td>
<td>1263</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>As 5 but with all regression paths and covariances constrained equal also</td>
<td>2355.4</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>As 5 but with only the path between friendship opportunities and friendship prevalence constrained equal also</td>
<td>2332.2</td>
<td>1264</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>As 7 but with path between friendship opportunities and extrinsic satisfaction constrained equal also</td>
<td>2333.4</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>As 8 but with path between cohesion (social support) and extrinsic satisfaction constrained equal also</td>
<td>2333.7</td>
<td>1266</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>As 9 but with path between cohesion (workload sharing) and extrinsic satisfaction constrained equal also</td>
<td>2336.1</td>
<td>1267</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>As 10 but with covariance between friendship opportunities and cohesion (social support) constrained equal also</td>
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<td>1268</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>As 10 but with covariance between cohesion (workload sharing) and cohesion (social support) constrained equal also</td>
<td>2339.3</td>
<td>1268</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>As 12 but with covariance between friendship opportunities and cohesion (workload sharing) constrained equal also</td>
<td>2339.8</td>
<td>1269</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>As 13 but with path between extrinsic satisfaction and intrinsic satisfaction constrained equal also</td>
<td>2340.2</td>
<td>1270</td>
<td>1270</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>As 14 but with path between extrinsic satisfaction and organisational commitment constrained equal also</td>
<td>2344.5</td>
<td>1271</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>As 15 but with path between intrinsic satisfaction and organisational commitment constrained equal also</td>
<td>2345.6</td>
<td>1272</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>ns</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>As 16 but with path between intrinsic satisfaction and intention to leave constrained equal also</td>
<td>2345.8</td>
<td>1273</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>As 17 but with path between organisational commitment and intention to leave constrained equal also</td>
<td>2346.0</td>
<td>1274</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $\Delta\chi^2$, difference in $\chi^2$ values; $\Delta df$, difference in degrees of freedom. All models are compared with Model 1.
Relationships Between Adult Attachment Style, Adoptees’ Motives for Searching, and Reunion Satisfaction with Birthmothers

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Abstract

The present study investigated the relationship between attachment styles and motives for searching among 109 adoptees who had searched for birth relatives. Searchers who had experienced face-to-face reunions with their birthmothers (n = 57) also completed items relating to their reunion satisfaction. Participants rated themselves on Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) four attachment prototypes. They also completed the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994) and the Motives for Searching Questionnaire, which identifies three search motives (i.e., searching to gain background information, to reconnect with birth relatives, and to resolve personal issues). While searching to reconnect with birth relatives and to resolve personal issues were both positively correlated with a preoccupied attachment style, differences also emerged between these two motives. Searching to reconnect with birth relatives was negatively correlated with a dismissing attachment style, while those who searched to resolve personal issues had a greater need for approval and less emotional closeness with their birthmothers. A secure attachment style was generally associated with better reunion outcomes, while those who saw relationships as secondary or had a higher need for approval were more likely to experience some negative reunion outcomes. Implications for counselling are discussed.

A number of researchers have demonstrated the usefulness of investigating adult relationships from an attachment perspective. For example, secure attachment has been positively associated with emotional trust (Feeney & Noller, 1992), and negatively correlated with loneliness (DiTommaso, Brannen-McNulty, Ross, & Burgess, 2003) and risk in intimacy (Feeney & Noller, 1992). There is also some evidence that secure people are more socially skilled and that their friends report greater satisfaction with the friendship (e.g., Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Weimer, Kerns, & Oldenburg, 2004).

Borders, Penny, and Portnoy’s (2000) study of adoptees and their non-adopted friends is one of the few that has explored adult attachment style in an adoption setting. They found that fewer adult adoptees were classified as secure compared with their non-adopted friends. Conversely, adoptees were more likely than non-adoptees to be categorised as preoccupied or fearful. We obtained similar results in a study comparing Australian adoptees and non-adoptees (Feeney, Passmore, & Peterson, 2004). However, when attachment was measured by the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994), we found a different pattern of results depending on whether or not the adoptee had actively searched for one or more birth relatives. Compared with non-adoptees, searchers were less confident in self and others (i.e., less secure), and reported higher levels of discomfort with closeness, preoccupation with relationships, and need for approval. Interestingly, nonsearching adoptees did not differ from the non-adoptees on any of the attachment scales. Conversely, Borders et al. (2000) found that searching and non-searching adoptees did not differ in terms of attachment style.

Edens and Cavell (1999) argued that attachment variables may help to explain “the often contradictory evidence concerning the meaning of the search for adopted persons” (p. 60). One possible explanation for the conflicting results noted earlier is that adoptees search for different reasons and that these search motives correlate with attachment measures in different ways. Therefore, our first aim was to investigate the relationships between attachment style and search motives in a group of searching adoptees. Due to a lack of previous research in this area, hypotheses remained tentative. However, we speculated that searching in order to resolve personal issues may be correlated with the more insecure attachment styles. Edens and Cavell also noted that pre-existing working models of self and others, as reflected in attachment styles, may explain how adoptees respond to reunions with birth relatives. Thus, our second aim was to explore the relationships among attachment style, search motives, and reunion outcomes in a subset of searching adoptees who had met their birthmothers. Again, there was a lack of relevant previous research in the adoption area. In view of previous research in the general relationship literature supporting a link between secure attachment and positive relationship outcomes,
however, it was hypothesised that secure individuals would report more favourable reunions with their birthmothers than would insecure individuals.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 109 searching adoptees (i.e., searchers), including those who were currently searching for birth relatives and those who had searched for birth relatives in the past. These searchers were drawn from a sample of 144 adoptees who had taken part in a larger study comparing adoptees and non-adoptees on various measures. All were born in Australia and had an Anglo-Australian background. All were adopted by non-relatives within the first two years of their birth, with the majority (94.4%) being adopted within the first 12 weeks. Following their adoptions, all lived with both adoptive parents until at least the age of 16. Ages ranged from 18 to 66, with a mean age of 39.21 years. Most of the participants were female (76.1%), were married or in a de facto relationship (62%), and had completed some further education beyond high school (79%).

Some analyses also focused on a subset of those adoptees who had searched for their birthmother and had had a face-to-face reunion with her. These reunited searchers comprised 57 adoptees. Demographics were generally similar to the larger group, with most being female (82.5%), married or in a de facto relationship (67.9%), and having some education beyond high school (78.9%). Ages ranged from 24 to 63, with a mean age of 39.35 years.

**Measures**

All participants completed measures of adult attachment style and motives for searching. Adoptees who had met their birthmothers also completed measures regarding reunion outcomes.

**Attachment measures.** Two attachment measures were used in the current study. First, participants read descriptions of the four attachment prototypes proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991); namely secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful. They then rated the extent to which each paragraph described their relationship style on a scale from 1 (not at all like me) to 7 (very much like me).

Participants also completed the 40-item Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Feeney et al., 1994), with each item being rated on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). The ASQ yields five subscores. The confidence in self and others subscale is similar to Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) secure dimension (e.g., “I find it relatively easy to get close to other people”). The other four subscales reflect various kinds of insecure attachment styles: discomfort with closeness, relationships as secondary to achievement, need for approval, and preoccupation with relationships.

**Motives for searching.** The Motives for Searching Questionnaire (MSQ; Passmore, Feeney, Peterson, & Shimmaki, 2005) was developed specifically for the larger study of which this research is a part. It consists of 13 items that tap various reasons an adoptee may have for searching for birth relatives. Each item is rated on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important). The MSQ includes three subscales: background information (4 items; e.g., “To find out about family history”), reconnect with birth relatives (4 items; e.g., “To establish a relationship with your birthparent/s”), and resolution of personal issues (5 items; e.g., “To help resolve some personal problems”).

**Reunion outcomes.** The 57 participants who had met their birthmothers also completed three items pertaining to their satisfaction with that reunion: “How satisfying was your initial reunion with your birthmother?”, “How satisfied are you with the amount of contact you have with your birthmother?”, and “How satisfying is your current relationship with your birthmother?”. Each of these items was rated on a scale from 1 (extremely dissatisfying) to 6 (extremely satisfying). Participants also rated their current relationship with their birthmother in terms of emotional closeness on a scale from 1 (extremely distant) to 6 (extremely close).

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited from various sources, including advertisements in the print and electronic media, psychology classes, university newsletters, flyers left in doctors’ and counsellor’s waiting rooms, adoption support groups, and networks available to the researchers. Those who met the inclusion criteria (e.g., Anglo-Australian, adopted by non-relatives within two years of birth) were sent a pack that included a cover letter, an informed consent form, the questionnaire, and a reply-paid envelope. They were also asked if they would be interested in participating in a follow-up questionnaire in six months time and an interview. Only data from Phase 1 are included in the current paper. While no incentives were offered for participation in Phase 1, participants received either movie vouchers or $20 if they completed the follow-up questionnaire.
Results

Using the full sample of 109 searching adoptees, adequate alpha coefficients were obtained for all subscales of the ASQ (alphas range from .76 to .90) and the MSQ (alphas range from .67 to .82).

To address our first aim, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed in order to explore the relationships between attachment style and search motives. Searching to resolve personal issues was positively correlated with need for approval \((r = .29, p < .01)\) and both preoccupation measures \((r = .20, p < .05\) for Bartholomew and Horowitz’s prototypes; \(r = .41, p < .001\) for the ASQ). Searching to reconnect with birth relatives was also positively correlated with both measures of preoccupied attachment \((r = .26, p < .01\) and \(r = .35, p < .001\) respectively), but negatively correlated with a dismissing attachment style \((r = -.29, p < .001)\). The only other significant correlation indicated that individuals who viewed relationships as secondary were less likely to search in order to find background information \((r = -.19, p < .05)\).

In keeping with our second aim, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed in order to investigate the relationships among attachment style, search motives, and reunion outcomes in the subset of searching participants who had met their birthmothers. Results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Intercorrelations Among Attachment Measures and Reunion Outcomes (n = 57)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reunion Outcomes</th>
<th>Initial sat.</th>
<th>Contact sat.</th>
<th>Current sat.</th>
<th>Closeness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attachment prototypes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
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<td>Dismissing</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
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<td>Fearful</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ASQ measures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rel. as secondary</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for approval</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Search motives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
<td>-.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnect</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Initial sat. = satisfaction with initial reunion, contact sat. = satisfaction with amount of contact, current sat. = satisfaction with current relationship, closeness = emotional closeness in current relationship. Due to missing data, n's for these correlations range from 43 to 57. *\(p < .05\). **\(p < .01\).

Discussion

Our first aim was to explore the relationship between attachment style and search motives in a group of searching adoptees. It was tentatively hypothesised that searching in order to resolve personal issues would be correlated with the more insecure attachment styles. There was some support for this hypothesis in that those who were more preoccupied with relationships and those who reported a higher need for approval were more likely to search in order to resolve personal issues. Perhaps not surprisingly, those who were more preoccupied with relationships were also more likely to search in order to reconnect with birth relatives, while those who had a more dismissing attachment style were less likely to search in order to reconnect with birth relatives. In contrast to the results for insecure attachment styles, secure attachment did not correlate significantly with any of the search motives.

It is interesting to speculate on reasons for the positive correlation between need for approval and searching to resolve personal issues. We had previously found that those who searched in order to resolve personal issues scored higher on depression and emotional arousability and perceived their adoptive mothers as less caring and
more controlling (Passmore et al., 2005). A link between depression and need for approval has also been established in previous literature (e.g., Strodl & Noller, 2003). Perhaps those individuals whose need for approval was not met by their adoptive mothers were more likely to search for their birthmothers in the hope of gaining that approval. Indeed, three of the items on the “resolve personal issues” factor tapped needs for belonging and a desire to find whom the adoptee resembled. Unfortunately, subsequent reunions did not always fulfill these hopes, as evidenced by the findings described below.

Our second aim was to investigate the relationships among attachment style, search motives, and reunion outcomes in a group of adoptees who had searched for, and subsequently met, their birthmothers. Some support was found for the hypothesis that secure individuals would report more favourable reunions than insecure individuals, particularly with regard to the initial reunion and the amount of contact. Secure individuals were also more likely to report emotional closeness with their birthmothers. Conversely, those who viewed relationships as secondary were less satisfied with their initial reunion and less emotionally close to their birthmothers. A higher need for approval was also associated with less satisfaction with the initial reunion.

Some relationships were also found between the search motives and reunion outcomes. Those who searched for information were less satisfied with the amount of contact and their current relationship with their birthmothers, perhaps because the information they wanted was insufficient, not forthcoming, or contrary to their expectations. Interestingly, those who searched in order to resolve personal issues reported less emotional closeness with their birthmothers.

These results have implications for counselling adoptees who are deciding whether or not to search or are currently undertaking a search. While many adoptees report that reunions have been beneficial for them personally (e.g., Pacheco & Eme, 1993), not all adoptees are satisfied with their reunion outcomes. Those who have a higher need for approval and/or search to resolve personal issues may be particularly vulnerable to disappointment if their reunion with their birthmother does not fulfil these needs. Counsellors should prepare adoptees for possible reunion outcomes, while concurrently helping them work through personal concerns. It may also be useful for the adoptee to consider the issues facing his or her birthmother, as she will also come to the reunion with her own hopes, fears, needs, and expectations (see Affleck & Steed, 2001). Once a reunion has taken place, the counsellor can assist adoptees and their birthmothers to work through their emerging relationship.

The current research has some limitations. First, we only considered search and reunion from the adoptee’s perspective. As the sample used to address our second aim only included those searching adoptees who had had face-to-face reunions with their birthmothers, we may have inadvertently excluded adoptees with the most dissatisfying outcomes (e.g., those whose phone or letter contact with the birthmother was not reciprocated or was terminated before a reunion could take place). Third, the cross-sectional and correlational nature of the study precludes definitive conclusions regarding causation. In view of the large number of correlations, it may also have been advisable to use a more conservative alpha level. However, given that this study was largely exploratory, it provides an interesting starting point for future research.

In our ongoing research program, we will be looking more specifically at adoptees’ search and reunion experiences through qualitative analysis of both our interview data and open-ended items from our questionnaire data. If larger sample sizes could be obtained in future research, it would also be possible to use structural equation modelling to assess relationships between various predictors of adoptees’ search motives. The dyadic nature of the reunion relationship could also be explored by investigating the attachment styles and search motives of both the adoptee and the birthmother. Moreover, researchers could investigate outcomes for those who have had unsuccessful searches and those whose contact with birthmothers was either not reciprocated or terminated. Such studies would benefit those involved in the search and reunion process, particularly those who may be at risk for relationship problems.

References


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The Patient is Dead: The Impact on Nurses

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Abstract

Taking Lewin’s person-environment approach, this study investigated the experiences of seven nurses who work in the complex and demanding environment of organ procurement surgery. A qualitative methodology, interpretive phenomenological analysis, was utilized to conduct the interviews. Analysis of the interview data revealed three core themes: existential issues, coping, and supporting each other. Following the phenomenological principle of finding the most appropriate theory to explain the results, the themes were interpreted according to existential, psychoanalytic (ego defence mechanisms) and social identity theories.

The way individuals represent their world to themselves is a function of both the person and the environment (Lewin, 1935). Lewin described internal forces that arise from an individual’s unmet needs. These internal forces, or psychic tensions, lead to internal disequilibrium (Lewin). Such forces engender a readiness to act and produce behaviour to regain internal equilibrium. These forces may be personal, such as one’s attitudes, biological, such as whether one is fatigued, physical, such as whether the environment is noxious, and social, such as whether one is interacting with others. Furthermore, a person’s attention and perceptual focus is captured by salience in the environment (Lewin, 1935).

Andrews (2005) has offered a critique of Lewin’s theory (1935), stating that it offers no means of predicting behaviour, that it only explains past behaviour. Like earlier critics (Brolyer, 1936-37, Garrett, 1939, Lindzey, 1952, London, 1944, all cited in Hall & Lindzey, 1985), Andrews elaborated his critique thus: predicting behaviour would require knowing the strength of the myriad of forces operating on an individual at any given moment. An impossible task.

Hall and Lindzey (1985) noted that Lewin’s (1935) theory does not clearly demonstrate how the external environment or the individual effect changes in one another; leaving it open to subjectivism. Another criticism directed at Lewin’s theory is that it fails to account for a person’s past experiences. Application of his theory lies in the here and now. Lewin’s theory, nevertheless, provides a broad framework in which to examine the retrospective and subjective experiences of nurses who work in organ procurement surgery, who, regardless of their past history must locate their work within a network of current and ongoing contextual work demands.

Lewin (1935) noted that the individual’s needs are shaped by cultural expectations. Cultural expectations influence what individuals notice, think and feel about their environment (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Behaviour is influenced by the informal demands of the operating room culture, group norms, degree of familiarity with colleagues, and interpersonal relationships. Individuals are not automatons in fulfilling their role descriptions; they bring their social skills and social roles to their functioning on the work team.

Professional roles embody a constellation of prescriptive cognitive, affective, and behavioural expectations, which are formally defined in professional Codes of Practice and hospital policy and procedure guidelines. When these formal edicts are applied to the practice arena, differences in role emphasis between individuals become evident (McGarvey, Chambers, & Boore, 2004). Each individual places a focus on the expression of the role, depending on the unique and characteristic way that individual has in approaching work, as well as, the needs of the situation (Lewin, 1935).

The Setting of the Study

Organ procurement surgery takes place within an operating surgical suite. Organ procurement is the surgical removal of organs from a person after brain death has been confirmed and the relatives have provided legal consent to this option. This type of surgery requires the collaborative effort of groups drawn from the disciplines of nursing, surgery, and anaesthesiology.

In addition, personnel come from other hospitals to retrieve organs for potential recipients. A transplant coordinator is involved with the donor’s relatives, the surgical teams, the nursing staff, and the prospective recipients of organs. Nurses who work in the operating room become part of the procurement process when the donor patient arrives at the operating room suite, for the duration of the surgical procedures, during the post-operative care and until the body is removed from the operating room suite and transferred to the mortuary.
In this context, what does it mean to be dead? The challenge for those who work in organ procurement surgery is that the donor has been declared brain-dead, that is, there has been an irreversible cessation of blood in the body or irreversible cessation of all cerebral function in a person (Human Tissue Act, 1982).

When the donor patient arrives, however, the nurses receive into their care an individual who appears to be alive. That is, the patient’s chest is rising and falling, there may be little or no evidence of injury, and the patient is warm to touch. Donor patients typically are individuals who have sustained a brain injury or a physical trauma, such as an accident.

In other words, while a donor patient may have been declared legally dead, the nurses regard the patient as alive until the heart stops beating. For the nurses this is linked to the act of switching off the ventilator, which keeps oxygen circulating. This act occurs during, not at the end, of the surgery.

Because the outcome for this patient will be death, the arrival of the patient to the operating suite generates conflict in the minds of the nurses. The norm is an expectation that the surgical intervention in which they will participate will be life enhancing, in easing the patient’s pain or in promoting the patient’s well-being. This work has been documented as stressful for these nurses (Fox, 2003) and one source of that stress is the question of what constitutes death (Carter-Gentry & McCurren, 2004; Regehr, Kjerulf, Popova, & Baker, 2004). Because the context of organ procurement surgery presents particular challenges to the individuals engaged in this work, and individuals bring to the context their personal history and workplace understandings, Lewin’s (1935) theory is suited to exploring the forces operating between the person and the environment.

**Aim**

Given that organ procurement is poised to expand from brain dead to include non-heart beating donors, it is timely to consider the person-environment forces (Lewin, 1935) on the operating room personnel who do this work. The aim in this study was to investigate the experience of nurses who work in organ procurement surgery.

**Method**

**Informants**

The convenience sample of seven informants comprised nurses who work in the operating room at an urban hospital. They were six females and one male, aged 37 to 58 years. As this type of surgery occurs unpredictably and the probability of participating in such surgery is not evenly distributed among staff, an inclusion criterion was adopted of having participated in a minimum of two organ procurements. All informants met this criterion.

**Qualitative Research Design**

The data produced by interviewing is “fundamentally well-suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of individuals’ lives: their perceptions, assumptions, prejudgements, and presuppositions” (van Manen, 1977 cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Miles and Huberman stated that these meanings can be linked to an individual’s social world. As the aim of this study was to explore how nurses perceived their involvement with organ procurement surgery, an interpretative phenomenological analytic approach was undertaken. This approach is useful when the researcher is concerned about complexity, process or novelty (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

**Data Collection Materials**

In interviewing, the researcher invited “the informant to recall, reveal, and construct aspects of subjective experiences and interpretations and to make that discussion coherent and meaningful” (Minichiello, Madison, Hayes, & Parmenter, 2004, p.413). The researcher did not construct questions to elicit predetermined answers or information corresponding to pre-coded response categories. Rather, questions emerged through the dialogue between informant and researcher.

**The Influence of the Researcher**

The researcher is a nurse, previously known to the informants. In an attempt to minimize researcher bias (Boyatzis, 1988), the researcher recorded reflections, ideas, and preconceptions. In addition, inter-rater reliability on a sample of data was .61.

**Procedure**

Each interview, approximately 45-60 minutes, was audio-taped. The informant was invited to tell a personal, illustrative story regarding organ procurement surgery.
Three core themes emerged from the interview data:

**Core Theme 1: Existential Issues**

This theme emerged consistently among all seven interviewees. A review of the data revealed challenges to existential beliefs regarding values and meanings around life and death. Comments made by informants displayed a heightened self-awareness. Reference was made to being confronted by one’s mortality, of being aware that one is finite, and of being isolated. Personal meaning came from a sense of being situated in the world in this specific context and then, reflectively and proactively being committed to living well. Informants spoke of being in the unique position of nursing both donors and recipients: “You want to do your best for this person (donor).” “You can see the good it [transplanting organs] can do”.

This core theme had five sub-themes, which were: 1) Confronting death; 2) Unpredictability of life; 3) Finding meaning in this work; 4) Ultimate aloneness; and 5) Challenge to live well. Examples of interviewee responses are: “It’s challenging our own mortality.” “I try to live life more fully.”

These themes fit with existential theories, such as those of Frankl (1963) and Maslow (1968). Beyond resolving conflicts or merely adapting to the environment, Frankl (1963), in his logotherapy, considered the raison d’etre for an individual is to find meaning and a sense of responsibility in existence through “actualizing values” (p.164).

Frankl (1963) wrote that the tension within an individual is a pre-requisite for living. Like Lewin (1935), Frankl regarded disequilibrium or inner tension as a motivational force to action. Unlike Lewin, Frankl located this tension in “a striving and struggle for some goal worthy of him [herself]” (p.166). The goal is not homeostasis, the discharge of tension, as it is for Lewin, but the orientation towards finding meaning in one’s life.

Frankl’s (1963) existential view regards an individual as self-determining, with the capacity to rise above unpredictable biological, current conditions, and sociological conditions, and to transcend them. In this way, suffering becomes meaningful. Similarly, Maslow (1968), through his model of a hierarchy of needs, proposed, at the highest need level, not a homeostatic seeking tendency within the individual by addressing unmet needs, but rather a growth-tendency to fulfill one’s potential; that is, to become all that one is capable of being.

Previous literature (Carter-Gentry & McCurren, 2004; Regehr et al., 2004; Bothamley, 1999) has noted the attitudes and feelings of nurses who are exposed to death and trauma in the specialized context of organ procurement surgery but has not sufficiently conceptualized this existential aspect. As a result of working in this context, the nurses seek meaning in their work, in their lives and in the lives of their patients. Lewin’s (1935) theory helps to describe the strength of the valence or force acting on the individual in such a context.

**Core Theme 2: Psychological Defense Mechanisms**

The interviewees described how they coped with the issues that arose for them in this type of work. The five sub-themes were: 1) Avoidance/Denial; 2) Being mindful; 3) Intellectualization; 4) Acknowledgment; 5) Not judging. Examples of interviewee responses are: “I don’t want to know…that he’s married with three kids.” “I have a duty to look after other [nurses].” “There are many sad stories here, this is just another one”.

Although there has been a tendency in the literature to conceptualise nurses’ operating room experiences within Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) stress, appraisal and coping model (Fox, 2003), this model does not offer a good fit for the current data. The nurses acknowledged that the work was demanding, lengthy and emotionally engaging. In contrast to previous literature (Regehr, et al., 2004; Bothamley, 1999), they did not speak in terms of stress, being overloaded or being overwhelmed, or being unable to meet demands.

This may be partly explained, first, by the fact that much of the previous literature is from the United States in which the practice is or has been for nurses to approach the relatives of the donor patient and request the donation of the organs (Regehr et al., 2004). In Australia, from the Victorian Organ Donation Service, a branch of the Red Cross, a nurse takes the role of organ donor coordinator. This person deals with the family and relatives. This spares the organ procurement surgery nurses from having to engage with the family regarding the organ donation process.

Second, the literature describes how nurses in the United States take the bones, such as the spine, from the donor in the operating room (Regehr et al., 2004). Nurses in this study are not involved in such work. Third, the literature describes mobile organ procurement nursing teams, who come to a hospital as a visiting team; this is in addition to the visiting surgical teams, and the more visiting teams, the more opportunity for conflict. Fourth, the literature describes organ being taken, not used, but left in the operating suite (2004). In Australia, organs are not procured without first having a designation, no matter how tentative.

One theoretical framework that can address the nurses’ core theme is Anna Freud’s (1966) theory on the psychological defence mechanisms of the ego. She described defences against painful affect. According to Anna Freud, defence mechanisms transform troubling affect into more manageable forms of affect. Defence
mechanisms can protect against anxiety or against lowering of one’s self-esteem. Defence mechanisms can enable one to adapt to the external world and to contribute to society.

These nurses described making use of ego defence mechanisms of denial, of intellectualisation, of splitting affect from cognition. For example, one said: “I just don’t want to know the patient’s personal history” [or it would be impossible to continue in the work long term.] Another nurse said: “I have a family who need me.” She went on to say that she has to be emotionally available to her family.

Core Theme 3: Supporting Each Other

All seven interviewees spoke of supporting one another to cope with the unique nature of this work. The four sub-themes were: 1) Protecting junior staff; 2) Awareness of potential effect on other staff; 3) Providing choice; and 4) Sharing a bond with one another.

For this core theme, social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982, Turner, 1987, both cited in Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 2005) offers an explanation for the nurses’ sense, when engaging in this type of surgery, of having a common identity, b) of belonging to a group of individuals who form a strong bond, and c) of being caring and mindful of each other. Social categorization is the process in which individuals perceive themselves as either members or non-members of groups (Tajfel, Turner). Social identity theory comprises two aspects: a personal identity and various social identities that derive from membership in various groups.

Individuals may boost their self-esteem by perceiving the groups in which they have membership, termed ingroups, more favourably than outgroups, ones in which the individual does not have membership. Identification with their work role as “nurses” leads to a social identity. For example, four of the seven nurses commented that “nurses look out for one another”.

These nurses bring their personal identities to this work. Five of the seven spoke of making their own unique contribution to this work and to one another. As social identity theory predicts, an individual may enhance self-esteem through personal achievements. These comments from the nurses address their personal achievements in the organ procurement context: “I stay near [the less experienced ones].” Some nurses presented themselves as individuals who have something unique to contribute: “I am a calming influence.” “[They can see that] I am one who has been there, done that, and coped.” “In this particular surgery, the team works well; you don’t find people shirking the work; everyone contributes.” In this way social identity theory helps to explain how the specialized context of organ procurement surgery facilitates both the nurses’ strong group bond and the opportunity for each nurse’s unique, personal contribution.

Supporting others occurred with a heightened awareness for the potential negative impact this work could have on nurses with less experience in this type of surgery. It elicited from more experienced nurses a concern for other nurses’ welfare. The experienced nurses were proactive in looking after, caring for, and expressing a responsibility for them. Examples of interviewee responses are: “The first thing I do is ask [the less experienced nurses], “Are you fine?” “[Afterwards] we’re all together and in some way nurturing and looking after each other’s soul and each other’s well-being.”

Conclusion

This paper reports on a study of the specialized setting of organ procurement surgery. The study made use of an interpretative phenomenological approach to interview seven nurses. The study provided the interviewees with an opportunity to describe their experience of this work. They spoke of ways in which the work has changed them, has allowed them to find inner resources, and has allowed them to bring their unique contribution to it. Understanding the person-environment forces may help to optimize the functioning of personnel carrying out this demanding work.

References


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Men and Masculinities: Shame and Support in Heterosexual and Homosexual Men’s Close Friendships

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Abstract

In this paper, preliminary findings from an ongoing project are presented in which heterosexual and homosexual men’s close friendships are compared and contrasted. Viewing close friendships through the lens of Gestalt Therapy’s theory of contact, men’s contact styles were explored. Interviews with 21 mid-life men (35-45 years, 11 homosexual and 10 heterosexual) were subjected to a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. The results revealed different definitions of friendship which appeared to be related to different constructions of masculinity. The polar experiences of support and shame emerged as important variables that influenced closeness and distance in men’s friendships respectively. Heterosexual men’s friendships were focussed on engaging in shared activities where independence and autonomy were highly valued. By contrast homosexual men reported a strongly interpersonal dimension in close friendships and personal acceptance was highly desired. Both groups reported that the issue of managing interpersonal boundaries was important. While intimacy was strongly regulated in heterosexual men’s friendships, by contrast for homosexual men, intimacy was negotiated. Both groups regarded interpersonal difference as both adding to and detracting from the friendships. Finally, the possibilities for multiple constructions of masculinity are explored as men’s friendships are both influenced by and in turn impact upon constructions of masculinity.

In Australia, looking at men’s friendships invariably invokes images of ‘best mates’. But what does the ubiquitous term ‘mates’ and the related term ‘mateship’ mean these days? The term has been claimed by a number of commentators and its meaning and existence is subject to debate (Altman, 1987; Edgar, 1997; Watson, 2005). Friendship is a more universal term, although its meaning has changed over time (Nardi, 1992). Close friendship suggests a degree of physical or emotional intimacy, although Rubin (1985) has described friendship as the ‘neglected relationship’. Furthermore the subject of close relationships between men often raises anxiety about homosexuality (Lehne, 1989) and what Herek (1987) has called a challenge to ‘heterosexual masculinity’. Closeness in male friendships is perceived to be layered with difficulty.

Several researchers have examined the area of intimacy in close heterosexual men’s friendships (e.g. Bergman, 1995; Cohen, 1992; Levant & Pollack, 1995; Lewis, 1978; Miller, 1983; Nardi, 1992; Reid & Fine, 1992; Rubin, 1985; Seidler, 1992; Sherrod, 1987; Veniegas & Peplau, 1997). However, there is debate about what constitutes intimacy and emotional support. Some researchers have critiqued current definitions of intimacy as overly feminised and not representative of masculine expressions of intimacy (Banks, 1995; Cancian, 1986). Swain (2000) has argued that men seek support and intimacy covertly through activities. It may be that men experience a different kind of intimacy through sharing activities and interests (Fehr, 2004). However, almost all of the research in this area is based on heterosexual populations, and as a consequence, heterosexual masculinities. Therefore understanding has been limited by excluding the experience of homosexual men and their friendships.

There is little research in the area of intimacy, support and closeness in homosexual men’s friendships. Nardi (1999) has suggested that homosexual men’s friendships have the potential for challenging the dominant structures of masculinity. This may occur through a different ability to experience intimacy and express vulnerability. Thus both heterosexual and homosexual male friendships need to be explored.

Friendships can be important sources of intimacy, closeness and support (Fehr, 2004; Floyd, 1997). One measure of intimacy is the degree of verbal and non-verbal self disclosure in personal relationships (Lewis, 1978). Studies of (heterosexual) men’s and women’s friendships have found that men appear to limit the degree of emotional self disclosure (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Rubin, 1985; Sherrod, 1987) and gender theorists have reported that women are more likely to engage in personal disclosure than men. Men’s friendships often emphasize the importance of activities and doing things together, whilst women show a greater interest in emotional sharing and talking (Sherrod, 1987). Therefore men and women differ but do these findings indicate that men are not able to obtain emotional support from each other?

Previous research (Fehr, 2004; Lewis, 1978; Morman & Floyd, 1998; Reid & Fine, 1992) has suggested that emotional support is linked to intimacy and personal disclosure. A key question concerns the interplay between
constructions of masculinity and views regarding intimacy. Several theorists have discussed the idea of Australian masculinity and mateship (Altman, 1987; Edgar, 1997). It is theorised that some of the ways that Australian masculinity is constructed does not allow for expression of intimacy and closeness outside extreme situations (e.g. war or disaster) or on the sporting field. In contemporary Australian culture there seems to be shame associated with male-male intimacy because it challenges the idea that men ‘should be’ self sufficient and strong.

Shame and Vulnerability

Shame may be experienced by men in situations when self support is challenged and support from other men is offered. It may be not as shameful to offer support since this act is consistent with the provider role. It is the receiving or the receptive role which may be problematic for many men. There is little qualitative evidence about men’s experience of shame and vulnerability in close friendships. This may be because the subject itself is likely to bring forth shame from one’s peers (Miller, 1983). Shame, which is related to the sense of self, is distinguished from guilt, which is related to actions or deeds (Kaufman, 1996). Shame is an intensely powerful emotion in which the individual feels “naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth” (Tomkins, 1963, p.118). Wurmsner (1997) suggests that term shame covers three concepts; the fear of disgrace, the emotion of self loathing when exposed and a protective character trait (i.e. shame as potential), that can prevent the experience of shame itself. Such is the power of shame that it has been theorised that people organise their contact with others around avoidance of shame as a means of self regulation (Jacobs, 1995).

In men’s friendships, shame or the potential for shame may have a central organising role. Some theorists have also suggested that men organise or construct their masculinity around the avoidance of femininity or feminine behaviour (Kimmel, 1994; Lehne, 1989). In this way, the approximation of any male behaviour with femininity may be considered shameful. Wheeler and Jones note the connection between gender and shame:

In our culture, shame-coded states and taboos are very nearly always associated with a gender dystonic position; that is a person-male or female– in a state of shame is very likely to be a person in a state or position that is acceptable for the other gender but not for his or her own (1996, 84).

The potential relationship between shame and masculinity requires a further understanding of the construct of masculinity.

Masculinity and Shame

The psychological study of masculinity has its origins in anthropology, biology and sociology, and gave rise to widely held views about male and female ‘sex-roles’. The sex-role paradigm has been extensively critiqued by a number of researchers (e.g. Kimmel, 1987; O’Neil, Good & Holmes, 1995; Pleck, 1981, 1995), and is no longer considered empirically valid. More weight has been given to the social construction of masculinity and femininity (Herek, 1987; Kimmel, 1987; Levant, 1995). Other developments have come from feminist studies (Chodorow, 1979), gay and lesbian writings (Altman, 1972) and the emergence of men’s studies. Furthermore, recent research (Connell, 1995) has pointed to the existence of multiple masculinities and the idea of a hierarchy of masculinities based on power differences. Of particular interest is the idea of a ‘hegemonic’ masculinity and the privileging of some masculinities over others. These ideas have given rise to an exploration of power relationships between and within masculinities (Frosh & Phoenix, 2001; Kimmel & Messner, 1989; Lyman, 1987).

There has been enormous political change in gender politics over the past thirty years, as Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1987) note pointing to the importance of the women’s movement, the gay rights movement and the men’s movement since the late 1960’s in Australia. These movements have challenged the existing social and gender order in far reaching ways (e.g. increased female participation in the workforce, new laws regarding sexual harassment and discrimination, increased visibility and acceptance of gays and lesbians). Despite these developments, a recent study indicated 35% of the Australian population believed that homosexuality was “immoral” (Flood & Hamilton, 2005). The increased awareness of the construction of masculinity in the Western world as well as the cultural changes noted above, appear to have created what some commentators have called a ‘crisis of masculinity’ (Brod, 1987; Kimmel, 1987; Levant, 1996). Traditional masculinity might be outdated, but it did provide clear (although not necessarily satisfactory) roles for men. Great uncertainty appears to exist about contemporary gender and masculinity. Plummer (1999) has argued that boys learn about masculinity through a vilification of homosexuals and homosexuality. ‘Traditional’ masculine ideals such as stoicism, strength, independence, in-expressiveness and the provider role are being questioned (Edgar, 1997) However, in the absence of ‘traditional’ masculinity, uncertainty and anxiety about one’s masculinity may exist, including the anxiety of being labelled homosexual.

Of interest are the underlying structures and forces that create and define masculinity. Masculinity may be defined as the way in which the male gender is constructed in social interaction. Kimmel and Messner (1989) define gender as the complex set of social meanings that are attached to biological sex, and the way in which they are enacted:
Gender is a term which has several meanings in the research literature. As noted above, Kimmel and Messner use gender both as a noun and a verb. In this paper, the term masculinity is used to describe the social construction of gender through the values, beliefs and experiences of men. Men's friendships are actively constructed, even though men may have little awareness of this. The way in which men's friendships are constructed may be influenced by contemporary definitions of masculinity (Nardi, 1992). This process of masculinity construction occurs from birth and takes place in the family, school, at play and at work (Connell, 1995).

Despite the ubiquity of men's friendships, the degree to which men seek each other out for closeness and intimacy is believed to be related to their construction of masculinity. Most of the current research has examined heterosexual and homosexual men as separate populations. In the present study the goal was to examine masculinity from a more inclusive position, including both heterosexual and homosexual men's friendships, and to explore male intimacy, closeness and support seeking. Traditional descriptions of masculinity have emphasised stoicism, low levels of emotional expression, aggression, competitiveness, strength and a focus on the provider role (Edgar, 1997). Although definitions of masculinity have changed, it is theorised that central elements of traditional masculinity remain, particularly an avoidance of vulnerability. It is theorised that the experience of vulnerability for many men is one of shame. Feelings of shame are intensely uncomfortable. In order to avoid these uncomfortable feelings of shame, friendships with other men may be organised around avoiding shame. Yontef (1996) argues that what is considered shameful is defined culturally. The process of constructing masculinity occurs within cultural settings. Masculinity is not a static concept but a dynamic process that is constructed in interaction. Men's friendships can provide a valuable source of insight into the active process of masculinity and the avoidance of vulnerability and shame.

Homosexual and Heterosexual Masculinities and Friendships

The goal of the present study was to explore possible relationships between masculinity and the construction of men's close friendships. To adopt a more inclusive view of masculinity, both heterosexual and homosexual men were included and intimacy and emotional support in men's close friendships were explored. Using a phenomenological approach to exploring men's friendships, a rich description of men's friendships was elicited, particularly their views about what defined the friendship, and how they managed interpersonal boundaries and regulated intimacy.

In the present study, the researcher endeavoured to examine men's constructions of intimacy utilising a qualitative research framework. This method of inquiry is similar to many of the principles underlying the Gestalt Therapy approach to understanding human behaviour. The gestalt approach is a holistic, present centred approach to understanding individuals, couples, families and systems and organisations. Underpinning the gestalt approach are three broad theoretical frameworks; phenomenology, field theory and dialogic process (Yontef, 1993).

Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1996) define qualitative research as “the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense of what is made” (p.2). Brown (1997) has noted that there are strong links between the skills obtained in Gestalt therapy training and in qualitative research. In qualitative research, the research instrument is the researcher. Gestalt training provides skills such as awareness training (of self, of others and of context), dealing with complexity, staying with process, working in the present, and availability of relationship. The current researcher is a gestalt therapist and brings this training to the research project.

The Gestalt approach provides a theory for understanding individuals and their relationship with others. Mackewn describes the Gestalt notion of contact:

Gestalt counselling and therapy study the individual at the contact boundary between the self and the environment, the relationship between the person and the situation, for it is here that client and counsellor can notice the patterns of how people connect (or fail to connect) to their surroundings and circumstances and thus learn about how they meet (or fail to meet) their needs (1997, p.27).

The 'need' referred to above, may be a physical need such as food or drink, or it may an interpersonal need such as love or care. It is theorised that in some individuals particular needs are experienced as shameful, especially if they are gender-dystonic. Of interest in the present study is how individuals ‘make contact with their environment’ and of particular interest how men make (or inhibit) contact with other male friends. This study is not an exploration of therapeutic relationships, nor were the interviews intended to be therapeutic. However as a gestalt therapist, the first researchers' training and clinical work is in the area of noticing and observing relationship patterns and assisting clients to identify their contact patterns. This perspective has been brought to this study, in order to examine men's relationship styles and patterns with their close male friends.

In this project, the aim was to examine support-seeking behaviour in men. In particular, men’s ability and inclination to seek out other men for social, emotional and psychological support. Mackewn (1997) defines self-support as the support individuals can give themselves and environmental support as the support that individuals...
gain outside themselves. To what extent do men consider other males as sources of emotional and social support, and to what extent do males consider the need for support? Developing an ability to both provide self-support and to seek support from outside of self is necessary for psychological maturity (Yontef, 1993). Examining perceptions of support in men is of vital importance in developing a better understanding of why men do or do not seek support.

What was of interest is how heterosexual and homosexual men construct their friendships and to examine similarities and differences. It was hypothesised that heterosexual men defend against intimacy with other men. For many men this may be a defence against shame, and the ultimate shame for some heterosexual men is homosexuality (Wheeler, 1996). In this study I explored men’s awareness of their relational needs (or friendship needs) and how they ‘acted’ on these needs, or how they made contact with male friends. It was further hypothesised that homosexual men’s friendships might be important sources of support against homophobia.

Method

Participants and Sampling

The participants were recruited through the investigators’ networks, utilising a snowball approach. Data was collected from a mixed sample of 22 males of which 11 identified as homosexual and 10 as heterosexual. The men were aged between 35-45 years and were white, predominantly middle-class professionals with tertiary degrees.

In-depth interviews were conducted for approximately one hour, and the tape recordings were transcribed verbatim. The interview questions were piloted on two male participants to assist in the development of the interview style and structure.

The participants were chosen because of their position in the mid-life stage of human development, which Levinson (1978, 1979) describes as the mid-life transition. In this period, men may be closely examining and potentially modifying their model of masculinity (O’Connor, 1981, 1993; Moreland, 1989). To this end, this age group was chosen in the hope of eliciting rich and insightful descriptions of their friendship experiences. The sample of homosexual and heterosexual men was difficult to obtain. Initially the investigator placed advertisements at various locations including several Universities, gyms, counselling centres and health centres. Not one participant or inquiry was received as a result of this process. It was theorised that men’s reluctance to come forward was in itself a possible indication of avoidance. The participants who took part were recruited via a direct approach from a third or fourth party.

Research Design

The current research was based on the ideas of social constructionism. Berger and Luckman (1967) have argued for the social construction of reality and its knowability through interpretative methods. In the present study the reality of men’s lives and friendship experiences were examined through the interpretation of interview data (Kvale, 1996). The present research is qualitative at both the conceptual and methodical level and gathered data through a series of in-depth interviews.

The method of interpreting the interview transcripts was hermeneutic phenomenology. The hermeneutic approach is a holistic approach as distinct from a causal one. This method involves understanding the parts in relation to the whole and understanding the whole as a collection of the parts. This is referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Minichiello, Aroni & Timewell, 1995).

By using a phenomenological approach, it was hoped to gain a sense of the participant’s experience as directly as possible. In order to do this, principles of phenomenological investigation were utilised; bracketing assumptions, emphasis on description and equal attention to all data (Spinelli, 2005). The interviewer’s task was to set aside judgments and pre-conceptions and to as much as possible open himself to the experience of the participant (Spinelli, 2005). It is also important to acknowledge the background and perspective of the researcher. The first researcher is a white, 40 year-old middle class gay man, and despite attempts to bracket assumptions as named above, these background factors will be present at some level.

Results and Discussion

Almost universally the men reported that they found the interviews challenging. The most challenging aspects of the interview involved being asked to think about asking for support in their close male friendships. The experience of discussing support and closeness with male friends appeared more difficult for the heterosexual men. Several participants reported that they had not considered their male friendships as places to

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2 Homophobia, defined as “unreasoning fear or hatred of homosexuals and to anti-homosexual beliefs and prejudices, (Flood & Hamilton, 2005, p.1).

3 Homosexual men were selected by self –identifying as gay. See Cass, 1979 and Troiden, 1989 for a fuller discussion of homosexual identity formation.
share emotions or to seek closeness. It was perhaps the potential for shame when considering male-male intimacy that was activated. Several heterosexual men reported that they had previously reflected on the topic of masculinity and most had previously reflected on their male friendships. Despite the experience of feeling challenged most participants reported the interviews were enjoyable because they led to a deeper level of personal awareness.

The analysis drew on principles of hermeneutics and phenomenology. Colaizzi’s (1978) method was used to extract significant statements, identify formulated meanings and to group these meanings together to arrive at an exhaustive description of the phenomena under investigation. The overall aim was to arrive at an underlying thematic structure of the participant’s experience (Polkinghorne, 1989).

In this section the main findings are presented and discussed. In comparing and contrasting homosexual and heterosexual men’s friendships three main themes were revealed. The first concerned the different construction of friendships, the second concerned the task of managing boundaries and the third area was the management of difference in friendships.

Construction of Friendship

**Heterosexual**

A strong theme that emerged from the heterosexual participants’ descriptions of their close male friendships was the theme of shared lives and shared activities. The heterosexual men interviewed in this study reported that their friendships were formed through common interests or shared experiences, or both. Sometimes through a shared experience a common interest emerged. In addition, the common interest may have served to consolidate the friendship. Neville comments on his awareness of ‘common interests’ as a starting point in his friendship.

*I’m not sure why we became friends, it’s such a long time ago. I guess we had common interests* [Trans 154-156].

The idea of common interests arose frequently in the heterosexual participants’ reports of close male friendships. These common interests varied considerably, but were usually activities or ideas about the ‘outer’ world, as compared with the ‘inner world’ (O’Connor, 1993). James comments on men’s interests in the ‘outer world’ of facts and events,

*I think it’s probably got something to do with relationships and how men relate. [thinking] From my end I think men don’t think so much about how they feel about things, more about actual things that happen. Like what they’ve done or achievements or things that are going on in the world as opposed to how you feel about the things that are going on in the world. That’s just from my experience... I’m not saying it’s the same for everyone, but in engineering it’s fairly common* [Trans, 76-81].

Whilst James is describing a close male friendship, he describes a way of relating that is not focused on emotional disclosure. This response was typical of many of the heterosexual men interviewed. For many heterosexual men there were ‘unwritten rules’ that governed the boundaries of their friendships. One of these rules appeared to be about self-sufficiency and independence as Nic comments:

*It’s funny...all my friendships with men, I think how they’re played out or what’s presupposed in them is that you bring to them your own independence and not a dependency on the other* [Trans, 921].

Nic’s use of the words ‘played out’ is interesting and suggests the metaphor of a game. It appears that one of the rules of the game is independence. The themes of games, sport and activities are all concepts that describe the active nature of many heterosexual men’s friendships. The focus was often on the activity rather than on the interpersonal dimension of the friendship. Through shared activities, there is an opportunity for a shared intimacy as Neville comments.

*To some extent it’s just hanging out, like Colin, I’ll go, I’ll go visit him in Ballarat and we’ll go fishing, and we’ll talk about stuff* [Trans, 167-168].

Intimacy through a shared activity or through being together was described by several heterosexual participants. Neville notes the opportunity to talk ‘about stuff’ whilst engaged in an activity together. It appears that the presence of a shared activity may have enabled a ‘safe’ intimacy. Overall, the heterosexual participants did report varying degrees of intimacy, but it usually occurred in the context of an activity, which enabled a level of closeness and emotional disclosure was not a central part of the interaction.

**Homosexual men**

By contrast, many of the homosexual participants described friendships with other homosexual men in terms of interpersonal attraction and closeness. In addition, identification of their homosexual identity was an important point of connection in their friendships with other homosexual men. The recognition of ‘sameness’ in the other, served to reflect back and confirm a part of themselves. The connections between homosexual men around the recognition and validation of their sexuality provided an opportunity for acceptance.

The feeling of acceptance was rated highly by the homosexual participants as a desirable feature of close male friendships. The identification of sameness provided a source of support. Being seen and accepted by a close homosexual friend was a central part of homosexual men’s friendships. Sam describes the important features of his close homosexual friendships:
I like how I can just be who I am with them. I can discuss whatever I want with them, whether it is a particular issue, whether it is a particular feeling about something, whether it is an opinion about something. I like the way we can laugh about stuff together, how we can take life really seriously and then go to the other extreme and have a lot of fun, write ourselves off. So kind of everything between the two. It's an easy interaction, it's easy to be around them, there's a sense of being accepted by them and understood by them when I need to be, and being supported by them too, during the tougher times. And it goes both ways [Trans, 245-253].

The feeling of being accepted was described as the freedom to be oneself and a sense of being understood. The experience of being accepted for “who I am” is an experience that may have particular meaning for homosexual people. Many of the homosexual men had a strong experience of being ‘the other’ and feeling different from mainstream masculinity. It follows that the experience of ‘being accepted’ might be highly valued. Furthermore, the friendship Sam described provided the opportunity for a full range of interactions from fun through to a deeper sense of mutual support during tougher times. The range of friendship interactions that Sam describes appears to deepen his sense of being known and accepted.

The feeling of being accepted by a homosexual friend appeared to allow homosexual men to express their masculinity freely. Many homosexual men expressed a tension with the heterosexual world that they inhabited and some found support in the homosexual world. The experience of being with a close homosexual friend, may allow them to feel safe to express their homosexuality. Neil comments on what he likes about his homosexual friendships.

Well that’s that other level of you know, being able to just comment on, not that I wouldn’t not comment about a guy’s looks or whatever to the straight mates but you just don’t even blink when you’re doing it in front of your gay friends. But, you know, there’s that gay sensibility that you bring to your friendships as well with the gay guys. So you can have the camp humour, you know...[Trans, 284-289]

There appeared to be a connection for homosexual friends around a gay sensibility, as Neil calls it. This may include a ‘camp’ sense of humour, which underlies the men’s connection around a similar type of masculinity. This type of homosexual masculinity is understood and has a common language and a common sense of humour.

Managing Boundaries

Heterosexual men

Heterosexual men described experiences of intimacy in their close friendships. The participants appeared to have a strong sense of their own comfort level and sometimes there was too much intimacy in the friendship. Bob reports discomfort in his relationships with men. He reported that the interview was very intense for him. It appears the level of intensity is higher when there is not an activity to focus on.

Yes and (the activity) it’s a safe reason to hang out together. I don’t want and I’ve never really sought intensity in (male) relationships. I don’t want to... I wouldn’t choose to sit like this and to sit and talk for an hour [Trans, 551-553].

Bob notes that he does not seek out too much intensity in his friendships, and that intimacy is carefully regulated. Bob describes quite explicitly his feeling of safety when there is an activity and a lack of comfort when there’s too much intensity. Other heterosexual participants were less explicit, but the underlying theme was anxiety about too much face to face intimacy.

Homosexual men: negotiating sexual intimacy and friendship

For some of the homosexual men, issues of trust, sexual tension and fidelity were primary issues in their close friendships with homosexual men. While some of the participants reported that these issues were manageable others reported a lack of trust and disappointment in their friendships with homosexual men. There was a sense from some of the participants that sexual needs and friendship needs were co-existing and competing needs. It appeared that an individual’s sexual need could disrupt a friendship. Matt describes his difficulty with drawing a boundary between competing needs:

Yes, I think I don’t know where to draw the line sometimes between friendships and..., because if I am attracted to somebody, it has happened in the past where I have had sex with them and then regretted it [Trans 804-806].

In this case, acting on the sexual feelings was regretted, but the issue appears more than one of sexual attraction. Matt is also describing the process of negotiating an interpersonal boundary. The theme of sexual attraction was present in many of the homosexual men’s close friendships. Sometimes the sexual attraction was described as a sexual tension as Roger notes:

I think it’s natural for there to be sexual tensions between gay men, I mean that’s par for the course, really [Trans 788-789].

For some of the participants these tensions were explicit and were either a source of ongoing tension or had been resolved. In either case, there was a sense that sexual attraction between homosexual men was natural, as Roger

4 ‘Straight’ is a colloquial term for a heterosexual person.
Dennis if he had sex with his best friend:

Yes, when we first met and it was just a one-off [Trans 495].

It appears the friendship developed after having sex together. This finding supports other research into same-sex friendships (Nardi, 1999; Altman, 1972). The intimacy issues did not appear to violate the homosexual men’s sense of masculinity in the same way that intimacy threatened heterosexual men’s masculinity. The homosexual men viewed intimacy as an issue to be negotiated, notwithstanding the challenges of this process.

Managing Differences

Both heterosexual and homosexual men reported that some level of personal difference added to the friendship. However where the level of personal difference was unmanageable, a conflict was experienced. The differences between the homosexual and heterosexual appeared to mirror their different constructions of friendship. The heterosexual men reported conflict about a difference that was generally external to the friendship. The homosexual men reported conflict that was generally of an interpersonal nature.

Heterosexual men

For the heterosexual men, differences that arose were initially described as external to the friendship. Arguments were often about points of difference in the ‘outer world’ and not often about interpersonal issues. Sometimes these differences became interpersonal and the result was a negative impact on the friendship. The area where conflict became the most interpersonal was in the area of competitiveness. The ‘world of work’ provided many opportunities for competitiveness. Eric comments on his relationship with his brother and their points of difference.

We argue every now and again about attitudes to work. I guess he has a sort of slightly different slant on how to approach some problems that he would have at work than I would perhaps- we sort of discuss that quite heatedly some times. Otherwise we get through that [Trans, 285-288].

He notes that these differences with his brother can become quite heated at times, but it appears the relationship is robust enough to withstand this level of difference. It appears that underneath their disagreement there was a foundation of respect that enables the friendship to “get through” it. Nic is a barrister and comments on rivalry with one of his close friends:

...one of these two guys works in my area, so we are in the same world professionally. And that means that there’s a range of sort of professional issues that come to play, including...well there's a certain rivalry [Trans, 482-484].

The level of competitiveness may be especially strong when friends work in the same field. Men could be a great source of support to each other, if they considered their friends as allies, rather than competitors.

Homosexual men

Conflict in homosexual men’s friendships seemed to provoke very strong feelings, often intolerable feelings, especially if the conflict was primarily interpersonal. If the source of difference was primarily external to the relationship, such as different tastes or personal preferences, then the difference may not result in conflict. As Nardi (1999) notes, conflict between homosexual friends may not be as problematic if the issue is of “minimal importance to the relationship itself” (p.177).

Conflicts sometimes arose from different needs, and a key source of conflict reported originated from different relationship needs. Matt comments on conflict with a close friend:

P: There was this guy that was a friend and he wanted more than friendship and I didn’t want that. I: He wanted sex? P: Yes he wanted a relationship. One day he sat me down and told me how he felt and everything and I was really scared because I didn’t feel the same way. So I basically avoided that person. And then he started ringing me and hassling me and shouting at me over the phone [Trans 968-971].

In this case it appeared the Matt’s and his friend’s needs were quite different. Matt’s response was to avoid contact, and this strategy was not untypical of many of the participants’ strategy in dealing with conflict. A result of not discussing a conflict may be a distancing in the friendship as Sam comments,

Oh, it was uncomfortable because we were so close and then I was starting to realise that that closeness was disappearing, at least within me anyway. That became uncomfortable because there was period there where we were unable to really talk about how the stuff that was going on at the time was impacting him, me and our friendship too [Trans, 1093-1097].

Sam’s comments point to the value of closeness in the friendship. The emphasis on the homosexual friendships was much more on the interpersonal dimension, rather than on a shared activity. In the event of a conflict, it is loss the interpersonal closeness that is highlighted. In contrast, the heterosexual participants reported a loss of the activity as central. It is assumed that the heterosexual men also experienced a feeling of loss in the event of a serious conflict. However, what was notable was that heterosexual men described the loss of the activity, rather than the underlying feelings.
Summary and Conclusion

Both heterosexual and homosexual men appeared to value their close friendships in similar, although different ways. Whilst both groups reported enjoyment of time spent with close friends, for the heterosexual men, their friendships appeared to be based more closely around activities that provided a feeling of closeness, but also limited the degree of emotional sharing. By contrast the homosexual men appeared to recognise the emotional closeness of their friendships, even though this may have occurred whilst engaged in mutually enjoyable activities. The heterosexual men’s friendships were described in ways that appeared to limit the potential for vulnerability. It was if a series of unspoken rules existed to manage the boundaries of intimacy. These boundary ‘rules’ appear to indicate the presence a type of heterosexual masculinity. These boundaries are constructed in relationship and may function to limit the possibility of shame.

By contrast homosexual men’s close friendships provided experiences of emotional and social support in ways that were qualitatively different from the heterosexual participants’ friendships. The feeling of belonging and the safety to be themselves were experiences that many of the homosexual participants did not experience in the ‘heterosexual world’. The connection to a close homosexual friend was experienced as both affirming and confirming. Whilst it is theorised that these close homosexual friendships might be especially important during formative stages in the development of a homosexual identity, they also appear important at other life stages, such as the mid-life stage. The degree of closeness was one that required negotiation as the potential for sexual intimacy appeared ubiquitous in homosexual men’s friendships.

Conflict emerged in both heterosexual and homosexual men’s friendships through personal differences. The interpersonal dimension was stronger for homosexual men, as expected, and was experienced as a relationship rupture if not attended to. For the heterosexual men, conflict was experienced in competitiveness and rivalry, especially when they worked in the same environment. Homosexual men also reported competitiveness although it was often about personal qualities or physical attributes.

The management of boundaries and conflict has implications for both homosexual and heterosexual men’s ability to seek out close friends for emotional support. It is theorised that the inability to manage these interpersonal boundaries risks the possibility of shame arising and a disruption to both seeking and receiving support.

As men were not observed ‘making contact’ with their close male friends, this was research was reliant on descriptions of their experiences (and their perspective of key events). This is a limitation of the present study, but a necessary one given that the present approach is phenomenological rather than naturalistic or ethnographic. Further research could be conducted to gain the perspective of the nominated friend. In this study men’s awareness of their relational needs (or friendship needs) were explored and how they ‘acted’ on these needs, or how they made contact with male friends. In this paper preliminary findings were reported from an ongoing research project. A future area for research includes ‘gay-straight’ friendships and the experience of men giving support to close male friends.

There are implications in current study for health professionals, educationalists and other professionals who work with men. Having an understanding of the role of vulnerability and the fear of shame in men may enhance an understanding of the difficulties men face in seeking emotional and social support. It is hoped that men will consider their male friends as sources of emotional support and by doing so will be constructing more supportive forms of masculinity.

References


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The Role of Communication Technology in the Dissolution of Marital, Cohabitating and Dating Relationships

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Abstract

Research on relationship dissolution has focused on married couples and largely ignored cohabiting and dating couples and there has been little research on the effect that new communication technologies (computers and mobile phones) have on relationships. The aim of this study was to examine the effect of satisfaction, commitment, relationship duration, time spent with partner, sexual intimacy, thoughts of ending the relationship, partner alternatives and communication technology on the stability and dissolution of marital, cohabiting and dating relationships. The participants were 217 men and women aged 17 to 58 years who were married, cohabitating or dating. Participants were administered: The Commitment, Sexual Intimacy and Partner Alternatives Questionnaire, Relationship Instability Questionnaire, Relationship Satisfaction Survey and the Communication Technology Survey. One hundred and sixty-three participants volunteered information about their current relationship and 54 volunteered information about their most recently dissolved relationship. The main findings were that most of the relationship variables including communication technology variables differentiated relationship status (continuing or dissolved); and women were more likely than men to end the relationship due to their partner forming alternative relationships via mobile phone or computer.

The experience of love and being in a romantic relationship contributes significantly to life satisfaction (Newcomb, 1986), while the dissolution of a relationship is often one of most traumatic and distressing experiences in life (Simpson, 1987). Research has focused mainly on the dissolution of marital relationships (Amato, 2000; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Shackelford & Buss, 1997). The few studies investigating dissolution of premarital relationships have examined several interrelated variables such as maintenance behaviours (e.g. spending time together, performing agreed upon tasks together and maintaining contact) self-disclosure, general comparison level, comparison level for alternative partners (Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990), love, commitment, sexual nature of relationship and relationship satisfaction (Booth, Johnson, White & Edwards, 1985; Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Peplau, Rubin & Hill, 1977; Simpson, 1987).

A relationship that provides many rewards and relatively few costs is believed to be attractive and satisfying (Levinger, 1976). High levels of relationship satisfaction are maintained by obtaining rewarding outcomes or lowering expectations (Arriaga, 2001). However, when relationship costs are too high and benefits too low, relationship satisfaction decreases and vulnerability to relationship dissolution increases (Edwards & Saunders, 1981). In dating couples relationship satisfaction was found to be the strongest predictor of relationship stability (Simpson, 1987). Arriaga (2001) examined change in the level of satisfaction in newly dating couples and found that fluctuations in satisfaction levels led to relationship dissolution. There are likely to be greater fluctuations in satisfaction in volatile relationships. Therefore, the costs may be too high and the rewards too low to sustain such relationships (Arriaga, 2001).

Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) linked relationship satisfaction to the use of maintenance behaviours and commitment in married couples. It has been shown that couples consider time spent together to be an important relationship maintenance strategy (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000; Baxter & Dindia, 1990). The degree of personal relationship satisfaction influences how hard people will work to ensure a relationship continues. People with higher levels of satisfaction are believed to be “more positive, to remain open, to reaffirm the importance of the relationship, to do things together and to perform agreed upon tasks” (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999, p. 264). Similarly, Halford, Wilson, Lizzio and Moore (2002) proposed that the effects of skills-based relationship education may be mediated via changes in relationship self-regulation. Relationship self-regulation refers to the amount of effort that each partner puts into sustaining the relationship (Halford, Sanders & Brehens, 1994). Time spent in shared activities is believed to increase relationship satisfaction because couples find shared activities enjoyable (Holman & Jacquart, 1988). Aron et al. (2000) showed that couples who participated in shared novel and arousing activities reported increased relationship quality. In turn, the increased use of relationship maintenance behaviours may increase the likelihood of a relationship continuing. Felmlee et al. (1990) found that in dating couples, spending more time together increased relationship stability. However, marriage may reflect a gendered approach to the use of maintenance behaviours. Weigel and Ballard-Reisch
People strongly committed to a relationship rarely consider terminating it (Levinger, 1976) and continue working on maintaining it even when dissatisfied (Bradbury, 1995). People with low commitment and satisfaction usually devote little effort to maintenance behaviours (Bradbury, 1995). Sprecher (2001) examined the impact of equity on relationship commitment, satisfaction and stability in dating couples and found that perceived inequity negatively impacted on commitment and satisfaction for men and women. Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl and Smith (2001) proposed that “the momentary experience of love helps intimate partners remain committed to one another” (p. 247). Gonzaga et al. (2001) found that married couples who displayed more love for each other in comparison to couples who displayed less love for each other, did more activities together, resolved conflict constructively and showed more commitment and stability in their relationships.

Relationships of longer duration have survived the initial critical and often more unstable stages of relationship formation and thus may be less susceptible to dissolution (Simpson, 1987). South and Spitze (1986) reported an inverse relationship between marital duration and the probability of divorce for women. Duemmler and Kobak (2001) found higher levels of commitment in couples still dating at a 12-month follow-up in comparison to those who had left their relationships.

Research focusing on the dissolution of marital relationships has shown that thinking about ending the relationship is one of the first steps to actually obtaining a divorce (Battaglia, Richard, Datteri & Lord, 1998; Booth & White, 1980; Booth et al., 1985; Broman, 2002). Booth and White (1980) suggest that relationship dissolution is a process and that thinking about ending the relationship is stage one of that process. Levinger (1976) proposed that comparison level for partner alternatives influences relationship stability. When individuals perceive the availability of attractive alternatives, they may be more likely to dissolve their current relationship (South, 1995). The absence of attractive alternatives is likely to influence the individual to remain in a relationship (Edwards & Saunders, 1981). Marriage, divorce and remarriage rates have been shown to increase when the number of single people increased in the population (South & Lloyd, 1995). In dating couples, relationship dissolution is more likely to occur when individuals rate their current partners as less attractive than perceived alternative partners (Felmlee et al., 1990; Sprecher, 2002; Simpson, 1987).

Most previous studies have found that people confine their search for alternative partners to local geographical areas, the workplace and social settings (Edwards & Saunders, 1981; Sanchez & Gager, 2000; South, 1995). However, contemporary communication technology provides a new means of finding partner alternatives in unprecedented numbers on a global scale. A recent woman’s magazine survey reported that one in ten women who accessed the World Wide Web at work formed a relationship, and had sex with a man they met online (cited in Singer, 2001). A lifestyle survey conducted by the Siemens Information and Communication Group (2002) reported that “Europeans keep their romances alive” and “conduct love affairs” via mobile phones.

Studies suggest that infidelity is higher for men (50%) than it is for women (40%) (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; South & Lloyd, 1995), but recent estimates indicate that this disparity is gradually being reduced (Banfield & McCabe, 2001). While men may be more likely to be engaged in extra-dyadic relationships, anecdotal reports suggest that women are more likely than men to check their partners’ SMS messages, mobile phone bills and computer files for confirmation of infidelity. The Siemens survey reported that many women admitted to checking their partners’ mobile phones for evidence of such affairs.

The aim of this study was to investigate differences between men and women in continuing and recently dissolved long-term dating, cohabiting and marital relationships with respect to satisfaction, commitment, relationship duration, time spent with partner, sexual intimacy, thoughts of ending relationship, comparison level for partner alternatives, relationships formed via mobile phone and computers, and likelihood of ending relationship because of mobile phones and computers. It was hypothesised that: (1) People in continuing relationships would have higher levels of satisfaction, commitment and sexual intimacy, longer duration relationships, and spend a greater amount of time with partners than individuals whose relationships had recently dissolved; (2) People whose relationships had recently dissolved would think about ending relationships more frequently than individuals in continuing relationships; (3) People in continuing relationships would perceive their current partner/relationship to be better than the available alternatives in comparison to individuals whose relationships had recently dissolved; (4) Men would have higher levels of relationship satisfaction and sexual intimacy than women; (5) Women would think about ending the relationship more frequently, form more relationships via mobile phones and computers, be more likely to end a relationship as a consequence of partner forming/maintaining a relationship via mobile phone or computer than men; and (6) People from recently dissolved relationships would form more relationships via mobile phones and computers and be more likely to dissolve a current relationship as a consequence of partner forming/maintaining a relationship via mobile phone or computer than individuals in continuing relationships.
Method

Participants

The participants were 97 men ($M = 33.72$, $SD = 12.57$) and 120 women ($M = 29.33$, $SD = 10.50$) aged between 17 and 58 years. Participants were volunteers recruited from Victoria University and the general community in Melbourne, Australia. One hundred and sixty-three participants volunteered information about a current relationship and 54 volunteered information about a recently dissolved relationship.

Materials

Participants completed the following questionnaires: (1) Demographic questionnaire; (2) Commitment, Sexual Intimacy and Partner Alternatives Questionnaire (CSIAQ) (Felmlee, Sprecher & Bassin, 1990) measuring commitment, sexual intimacy and partner alternatives on seven-point Likert scales ($\alpha = 0.64$); (3) Relationship Instability Questionnaire (RIQ) (Booth et al., 1985) measuring thoughts of ending the relationship on a five-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.87$); (4) Relationship Satisfaction Survey (RSS) (Shackelford & Buss, 1997) measuring relationship satisfaction on a seven-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.83$); and (5) Communication Technology Survey (CTS) developed for the present study to measure mobile phone and computer use and the effect of these technologies in relationship formation and dissolution ($\alpha = 0.65$).

Procedure

Participants received a set of questionnaires that included an invitation to participate in the study and an informed consent form. Completed questionnaires were returned by mail or placed in a drop box to assure confidentiality.

Results

Multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to examine the effects of relationship status (continuing and dissolved) and gender on relationship satisfaction, commitment, relationship and duration, and time spent with partner, sexual intimacy, thoughts of ending relationship, comparison level for partner alternatives, number of relationships formed via mobile phone and computers and likelihood of ending relationship because of mobile phones and computers.

There were significant main effects for relationship status $Wilks’ Lambda = .61, F(11,203) = 11.79, p = .0001, partial \eta^2 = .39$, and gender $Wilks’ Lambda = .86, F(11,203) = 2.94, p = .001, partial \eta^2 = .14$ and there was also a significant interaction effect between gender and relationship status $Wilks’ Lambda = .84, F(11,203) = 3.52, p = .0001, partial \eta^2 = .16$.

Table 1 shows that in comparison to participants from a recently dissolved relationship, those in continuing relationships reported significantly higher scores for satisfaction, commitment, time spent with partner, sexual intimacy, and partner alternatives, but significantly lower scores for thoughts of ending the relationship and number of relationships formed using mobile phones.

Table 2 shows that men reported significantly higher scores for satisfaction and sexual intimacy than women. Women were significantly more likely than men to entertain thoughts about ending the relationship and to end a relationship because partners formed relationships via mobile telephones and via the Internet.
Table 1

**Means and Standard Deviations and Univariate ANOVA Results for Relationship Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Continuing (n = 163)</th>
<th>Dissolved (n = 54)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>17.86 3.03</td>
<td>14.22 4.61</td>
<td>39.13</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>6.07 1.77</td>
<td>5.11 1.69</td>
<td>13.41</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Duration</td>
<td>9.36 9.68</td>
<td>2.30 3.65</td>
<td>31.07</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time With Partner</td>
<td>51.74 32.98</td>
<td>37.08 36.25</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Intimacy</td>
<td>9.36 2.11</td>
<td>8.35 2.78</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts of Ending Relationship</td>
<td>14.08 5.95</td>
<td>20.54 4.25</td>
<td>51.67</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Alternatives</td>
<td>7.71 1.55</td>
<td>5.33 2.28</td>
<td>69.80</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations Formed Mobile Phone</td>
<td>1.16 0.64</td>
<td>1.35 0.96</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Relationship, Partner Formed Relationship via Mobile Phone</td>
<td>3.61 2.57</td>
<td>3.72 2.33</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Formed Computer</td>
<td>1.46 1.21</td>
<td>2.26 1.79</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Relationship, Partner Formed Relationships via Computer</td>
<td>3.68 2.54</td>
<td>4.31 2.18</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were significant interaction effects between relationship status and gender for satisfaction $F(1,213) = 23.07, p = .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$, relationship duration $F(1,213) = 5.85, p = .016$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, sexual intimacy $F(1,213) = 5.11, p = .025$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, and number of relationships formed using mobile telephones $F(1,213) = 5.71, p = .018$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$.

Table 2 shows that levels of satisfaction and sexual intimacy were lowest for women from recently dissolved relationships. Men and women in continuing relationships reported longer relationship durations than men and women from recently dissolved relationships, but men in continuing relationships reported significantly longer relationship durations than comparable women. Men from recently dissolved relationships formed significantly more relationships via mobile telephones than women from recently dissolved relationships.

Table 2

**Means and Standard Deviations and Univariate ANOVA Results for Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Men (n = 97)</th>
<th>Women (n = 120)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>17.28 3.36</td>
<td>16.70 4.15</td>
<td>11.49</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>5.80 1.95</td>
<td>5.86 1.67</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Duration</td>
<td>9.40 10.19</td>
<td>6.14 7.87</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time With Partner</td>
<td>52.11 36.13</td>
<td>44.84 32.59</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Intimacy</td>
<td>9.32 2.08</td>
<td>8.94 2.51</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts of Ending Relationship</td>
<td>14.35 5.90</td>
<td>16.77 6.31</td>
<td>11.41</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Alternatives</td>
<td>7.08 2.06</td>
<td>7.15 2.01</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations Formed Mobile Phone</td>
<td>1.18 0.58</td>
<td>1.23 0.84</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Relationship, Partner Formed Relationships via Mobile Phone</td>
<td>3.02 2.43</td>
<td>4.13 2.47</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships Formed Internet</td>
<td>1.60 1.43</td>
<td>1.71 1.41</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Relationship, Partner Formed Relationships via Internet</td>
<td>3.23 2.41</td>
<td>4.33 2.41</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that levels of satisfaction and sexual intimacy were lowest for women from recently dissolved relationships. Men and women in continuing relationships reported longer relationship durations than men and women from recently dissolved relationships, but men in continuing relationships reported significantly longer relationship durations than comparable women. Men from recently dissolved relationships formed significantly more relationships via mobile telephones than women from recently dissolved relationships.
Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations by Relationship Status by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Continuing Men (n=74)</th>
<th>Continuing Women (n=89)</th>
<th>Dissolved Men (n=23)</th>
<th>Dissolved Women (n=31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>17.46</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>18.20</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Duration</td>
<td>11.92</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time With Partner</td>
<td>57.34</td>
<td>34.71</td>
<td>47.08</td>
<td>30.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Intimacy</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>9.38</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts of Ending Relationship</td>
<td>13.18</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>14.83</td>
<td>5.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Alternatives</td>
<td>7.53</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships Formed Mobile Phone</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Ending Relationship and Mobile Phones</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships Formed Internet</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Ending Relationship and Computers</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The results of our study showed that women from recently dissolved relationships reported lower levels of satisfaction than men and women whose relationships were intact. This finding supports the research of Arriaga (2001), Simpson (1987) and Weigel et al. (1999) that showed people with higher levels of satisfaction were more likely to remain in relationships and those with lower levels of satisfaction were more vulnerable to relationship dissolution. The results indicate that women who were more satisfied in their relationships were more likely to continue in it, whereas satisfaction has little effect on men’s decisions to stay or leave a relationship.

Baxter and Dindia (1990) suggested that increased satisfaction, as well as increased interaction, communication and liking were related to spending more time with one’s partner. Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) found that perceptions of marital satisfaction were more important for women than for men and suggested gender differences in relationship maintenance behaviours may explain these findings. The results of the current study are consistent with Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) as we found that spending more time with partners, which is an important relationship maintenance strategy (Aron et al., 2000; Baxter & Dindia, 1990), was associated with the continuation of a relationship, as reported by Felmlee et al. (1990). However, we found no significant differences between men and women from recently dissolved relationships with respect to the time they spent with their respective partners.

The finding that sexual intimacy was a significant factor contributing to relationship stability/dissolution for women only partly supported the findings of previous research. In a study of newly married couples, Henderson-King and Veroff (1994) found that sexual satisfaction was related to marital satisfaction for men and women. Similarly, in a study of dating couples, Sprecher (2002) found that couples in continuing relationships reported significantly higher levels of sexual satisfaction than couples whose relationships had recently dissolved. Felmlee et al. (1990) found that sexual intimacy was not a significant predictor of relationship dissolution in dating relationships.

The current study assessed the level of sexual intimacy, not sexual satisfaction in married, cohabiting, and dating participants. It could be speculated that sexual intimacy and sexual satisfaction are two separate constructs for women, but not for men. Men may have been “socialised to think of sex in terms of their own satisfaction, as something to pursue exclusively for their own benefit” (Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994, p.531). Whatever the reason, the results of the current study indicate that sexual intimacy is an important factor influencing women’s relationship stability and appears to be just as important as satisfaction in the maintenance of relationships for women. Indeed, sexual intimacy and relationship satisfaction may actually be linked. Specifically, in comparison to other women, women who perceive a higher level of sexual intimacy in their relationships may be more satisfied and less likely to end a relationship.
The main element of commitment is the tendency to remain in the same relationship over time (Bradbury, 1995; Levinger, 1976). The findings of our study showed that men and women with higher levels of commitment were in continuing relationships, while those with lower levels of commitment were from recently dissolved relationships. This suggests that commitment has a strong influence on relationship stability/dissolution. Our results also show that relationship duration is a significant factor impacting on the stability of relationships and supports previous findings (e.g. Felmlee et al., 1990; Maneker & Rankin, 1987). The likelihood of dissolution decreases with increased time spent in the relationship. However, men in continuing relationships reported mean relationship durations of nearly 12 years in comparison to about seven years for women. Men whose relationships had recently dissolved reported mean relationship durations of about one year, whereas comparable women reported mean relationship durations of just over three years. Relationship duration appears to more strongly differentiate between men in continuing and recently dissolved relationships than it does for women.

The finding that men and women whose relationships had recently dissolved, thought about ending the relationship more often than those in continuing relationships supports research by Booth and White (1980), Booth et al. (1985), and Broman (2002). The results of our study also showed that regardless of relationship status, women reported thinking about ending the relationship significantly more often than men did. Booth and White (1980) suggested that due to gender role socialisation, women were more likely to sense when a relationship was breaking down. This may lead women to think more about ending a relationship.

Men and women in continuing relationships perceived their current partner and relationship to be much better than the available alternatives in comparison to people whose relationships had recently dissolved. This finding was consistent with those of Felmlee et al. (1990), who found in a sample of dating couples that the probability of relationship dissolution increased significantly when individuals assessed the alternatives to be better than their current relationship. Thus, the mere belief that the alternatives are more favourable than the current relationship/partner may be enough to prompt individuals to dissolve a relationship (Battaglia et al., 1998).

The results of our study showed that relative to men and women in a continuing relationship, those from a recently dissolved relationship formed significantly more relationships using mobile telephones. Descriptive data showed that 57% of individuals whose relationship had recently dissolved reported forming from “one” to “more than five” relationships via mobile phone compared to 23% of individuals in continuing relationships. The results also showed that many of these relationships were intimate in nature. For example, of the 57% of individuals whose relationships had recently dissolved, 46.3% reported that the relationships formed via mobile phones were “slightly intimate” to “extremely intimate” in nature. Men whose relationships had recently dissolved were significantly more likely than women to form relationships using their mobile phones.

Interestingly, the results also showed that men and women in continuing relationships used mobile phones to form new relationships. For example, of the 23% of individuals in continuing relationships who had formed relationships via mobile phones, 21.4% reported that the relationships were “slightly intimate” to “extremely intimate”.

Participants were asked to indicate how many relationships they had formed and/or maintained via email and the Internet on a scale from “none” to “more than five”. There was no significant relationship found between the number of relationships formed and relationship status, but the descriptive data showed that 8.6% of individuals in continuing relationships had formed at least one relationship, in comparison to 18.5% of individuals whose relationships had recently dissolved. These findings support anecdotal reports of people forming intimate romantic relationships online.

Clearly, computers are being used by individuals in continuing and from recently dissolved relationships as a means to forming and maintaining romantic relationships. This can have a major impact if individuals who are in continuing relationships are forming alternative relationships without their partner’s knowledge. Indeed, it may be construed as infidelity and lead to relationship dissolution. Even though a greater number of individuals whose relationships had recently dissolved had formed new romantic relationships via this medium, it remains unclear if they actually formed those relationships while in a continuing relationship, or if those alternative relationships actually contributed to their relationship breakdown.

There was no significant association between gender and number of relationships formed via computer. However, a slightly higher number of women (14.2%) had formed and/or maintained relationships via this medium in comparison to men (12.4%). Singer (2001) reported that one in ten women formed an intimate sexual relationship with a man they met online. Our results indicate that more women are increasingly using this medium to form relationships.

The results of our study show that relationship stability/dissolution was not significantly related to the likelihood of ending a relationship as a consequence of a partner forming and/or maintaining a relationship with another person using mobile phones or computers. However, regardless of relationship status, women were significantly more likely than men to report ending a current relationship as a consequence of a partner forming/maintaining other relationships via mobile phone or computer. Theories of relationship infidelity suggest that men are more distressed by sexual infidelity, while women are more distressed by emotional infidelity (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). If this is the case, men and women may be assuming that the relationships formed by partners using these media were emotional in nature. This may be more distressing for women than for men leading to a greater number of women reporting that they would dissolve the relationship.
Alternatively, men may be less aware than women of partners forming relationships using mobile phones and computers. The findings that the formation of relationships via mobile phones, but not via computers differed by relationship status may be due to the convenience of mobile phones, which can be in a person’s possession 24-hours per day. Computers may be less accessible and slightly more inconvenient. Nevertheless, mobile phones and computers are clearly important new factors for relationships, particularly for the formation and maintenance of new relationships.

Theories of relationship dissolution have focused primarily on marital relationships. Information regarding the break-up of cohabiting and dating relationships is limited. Furthermore, the research that is available has frequently measured different constructs in marital, cohabiting and dating populations. The current findings emphasise the fact that most of the documented determinants of relationship stability/dissolution impact on marital, cohabiting and dating relationships. The data indicate that there are important differences between individuals in continuing relationships and those whose relationships have recently dissolved in the determinants of relationship stability/dissolution.

In summary, the current findings provide evidence for the anecdotal reports that communication technology is impacting on romantic relationships. Couples are forming/maintaining romantic relationships using mobile phones and computers, and they are willing to end a relationship as consequence of partners forming alternative relationships via communication technology. The current methodology may be too simple to account for all the complexities for relationship stability/dissolution. Nevertheless, the research provides novel information for future research and for counsellors working with couples in troubled relationships.

References


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Abstract

All relationships are regulated by a system of rules and expectations about how to act, that dictate what is expected and acceptable behaviour within those relationships. Such rules may be implicit or explicit, and serve a number of functions, from regulating behaviour, to facilitating the development of trust and promoting cohesion. This is particularly true of our romantic relationships with our partners, which is the focus of the present research. Research has typically focused on specific rules or betrayals, such as sexual infidelity. The use of both qualitative and quantitative suggests that rules exist about a range of topics, and that there is a structure and hierarchy to the rules and expectations that exist within romantic relationships. Different types of rules, their importance to the relationship and the process by which they were arrived at were investigated, as well as how such rules are violated, and the potential threat violation presents to the relationship. Clarifying the process by which relationship rules are established and violated has implications for a relationship’s repair or dissolution. The findings are presented as a conceptual model of the setting and violation of rules in romantic relationships.

The presence of rules and expectations in relationships has been an area that is under-represented in the psychological literature. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) first discussed the idea of rules and norms in relationships in their early work which produced the Social Exchange Model. They defined norms as behavioural rules that inform an individual of requirements for behaviour in different situations. For us to form, develop and continue relationships, we have expectations of our relationship partners, in that we expect them to behave and communicate with us in specific ways, and this is particularly true within those relationships we have with our romantic partners. Rules and expectations have a number of functions. According to Argyle and Henderson (1984), such rules and expectations function to enable the attainment of goals through the regulation and co-ordination of behaviour. Further, Shimanoff (1980) suggested that the presence of rules stipulates those behaviours that are specifically required within the relationship and those that are prohibited. According to Burgoon (1993), expectations indicate an ongoing pattern of behaviour that can be expected and predicted. In the context of romantic relationships, the goal of implementing rules and expectations may be seen as cohesion of the dyad, and continuity of the relationship.

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) suggested there are two features that are characteristic of norms and define them as such. The first is that norms are stable over time. This stability means that there is consistency of expectation, so that individuals know what is expected of them today, is what will be expected of them next week, as well as in the future. The second feature is that norms only exist (as norms) if there is agreement between dyad members. These features of stability over time and agreement provide consistency of values between the dyad members, and serve to promote cohesion of the dyad.

Expectations and rules have their origins in a number of sources, including social norms, internal working models from relationships, past relationship experiences, and personal knowledge of an individual (Afifi & Metts, 1998; Burgoon, 1993; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Further, as one would expect, rules and expectations may be transferred across relationships. Due to the variety of their sources, and the individual nature of these sources, rules and expectations are not the same across dyads, but grow out of the combination of the couple member’s individual experiences and their dyadic pattern of interaction.

While Thibaut and Kelley (1959) identified the presence of rules and norms in their early work, and despite the fact that we know we all have expectations of our relationship partners, little is known about what rules actually exist in relationships, whether there are similarities between dyads, how these rules are structured, and how they come to exist.

The research literature typically focuses on the impact of violated rules in social settings. In the communication field, Burgoon (1978) pioneered research into expectancy and expectancy violation. This field of research has investigated interaction expectations specifically to do with communication, such as in terms of gaze, distance, affection and other micro-behaviours. Expectancy Violation Theory was developed within the

Another version of this paper with a broader focus and additional results has been submitted to the conference of the Australian Psychological Society.
communication field, and focuses specifically on the verbal and non-verbal messages that people send in their communication interactions.

In the psychological literature, rules and expectations have received little attention. Like in the communication research, the focus has been on the impact of rule violation, and more specifically, it is usually the violation of highly salient and potent rules, such as sexual betrayal and infidelity. The psychological literature uses the terms betrayal or relational transgression to refer to instances of rule violation in romantic relationships, and therefore acts of rule violation are not even referred to as such. Roloff and Cloven (1994) did define such transgressions as expectation violations, while Jones and Burdette (1994) defined betrayal as the violation of the expectation of trust in a relationship. Thus, betrayal occurs when there is a violation of expectations that are pivotal to the maintenance of the relationship.

Elavgan and Shapiro (1998) echo this position of pivotal expectations in their research. They developed a model of betrayal within an organisational setting, however suggested that two of the criteria for betrayal to occur are that the expectations that are violated must be expectations that are pivotal to the relationship, and, like Thibaut and Kelley (1959), these expectations must be mutually known.

Despite the focus on the impact of rule violation, studies by both Argyle and Henderson (1984) and Baxter (1986) investigated rules and expectations in relationships. Argyle and Henderson (1984) focussed on rules in friendships, and conducted four studies in order to investigate this. They looked at what makes a rule a rule, as well as trying to establish the specific rules that exist in friendships. They suggested that one criterion for defining rules is that the breaking of a rule results in consistent consequences. This tells us that the literature that focuses on rule violation, may, in fact help inform us about which rules exist in the first place, if we can identify which rules were broken. In terms of identifying specific friendship rules, Argyle and Henderson’s (1984) results generated a number of rules from which the following factors or categories emerged: rules about Verbal Communication, Emotional Commitment, Time Demands, an Unlabelled category, and Exchange. Of those, rules that received the greatest endorsement were rules dictating trust and support.

Baxter’s (1986) work investigated the rules and expectations people have in their opposite-sex romantic relationships. Baxter obtained accounts of relationship break-ups from college students, and, working backwards, derived the rule categories from the perceived violations that participants reported. Eight primary rule categories were derived: Autonomy, Similarity Display, Supportiveness, Openness, Loyalty/Fidelity, Shared Time, Equity, and Romance.

In examining the results of both Argyle and Henderson (1984) and Baxter (1986), there appear to be some similarities between the researcher’s categorisations, such as the common categories of Supportiveness, and the similar categories of Shared Time and Time Demands for example. This suggests there may be common rules that exist across various types of relationships.

Afifi and Metts (1998) attempted to develop a typology of expectation violations in romantic relationships. By examining their categories of violation, it is possible to examine what the actual rules are that were violated. Again, there appear to be some similarities between the categories from Afifi and Metts’ (1998) work, and the categories developed by Argyle and Henderson (1984) and Baxter (1986). The categories of violation suggested by Afifi and Metts (1998) included Criticism or Accusation, Relationship escalation, Relationship de-escalation, Uncharacteristic relational behaviour, Uncharacteristic social behaviour, Transgressions, Acts of devotion, Acts of disregard, and Gestures of inclusion.

While it is acknowledged that rules and expectations exist in our relationships, there appears to be little understanding of what rules exist, how they come to exist, their structure, and their function for the relationship. The aim of the current study was to try and explicate participants’ understanding of what relationship rules and expectations are. Due to the lack of research that investigates this process, no specific hypotheses were suggested, however some broad research questions were posed in order to guide the research. A number of research questions were posed, and these have been presented elsewhere, however the two questions that are the focus of this research paper were “What is a relationship rule?” in order to understand participants’ definitions of the term, and “What rules and expectations typically exist in romantic relationships?” A qualitative study was proposed.

Method

Participants

The focus group consisted of six male participants, ranging in age from 45 to 61 years, with a mean age of 53.5 years. All participants had one previous marriage. Five heterosexual couples (males $n=5$, females, $n=5$) participated in the interview phase of the study. The ages of the couple members ranged from 25 to 76 years. All couples were involved in either married, engaged or defacto relationships ranging in length from two to 32 years.

Participants were recruited through media outreach, including through advertisements in state-wide and local newspapers. Community agencies providing a range of counselling and support services for individuals and...
couples were approached for permission to make details of the research available to their clients. It was up to interested individuals to contact the researcher in order to participate.

**Procedures**

Open sampling was considered to be the most appropriate form of sampling of those who responded to recruitment advertisements. While a certain sample size was anticipated beforehand, this could not be precisely established, and was contingent on theoretical saturation. The aim was to receive sufficient respondents to run three focus groups – one female, one male, and one mixed gender, however this was contingent on the responses received. Once the focus groups were completed, it was aimed to recruit between 6 and 10 couples to participate in the couple interview phase.

Despite extensive attempts at recruitment and advertising, only one focus group was run. This group consisted of six males, who were all members of a men’s group offering support post-separation and divorce. The interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary, and that their information would be kept confidential. The participants were also informed that their focus group was being video-taped for transcription purposes. The focus group lasted approximately 1 ½ hours.

Due to the low response rate, it was decided to proceed with the couple interviews after the single focus group, using the same semi-structured interview schedule. Despite widespread advertising and recruitment, five couple interviews were completed. The interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary, and that their information would be kept confidential. The participants were also informed that their interview was being audio-taped for transcription purposes. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Due to the nature of the current study as being essentially exploratory and largely descriptive, it was decided that a semi-structured schedule of basic discussion questions to be prompted by the researcher was the most appropriate methodological procedure.

The semi-structured interview consisted of eight open-ended questions that were aimed towards understanding how individuals and couple’s defined ‘relationship rules’ and ‘expectations’ (e.g. “What is a relationship rule?”), what types of rules and expectations exist in relationships (e.g. “What boundaries/rules exist in relationships?” “About which topics or behaviours do boundaries/rules/expectations exist?”), how they come to exist (e.g. “How do you decide what is a rule?”), and what happens when they are violated (e.g. “Under what conditions do you think someone violates a relationship boundary/rule?” “What effects does boundary/rule violation have?”).

**Data Analysis**

All tapes were transcribed. A qualitative approach with a focus on thematic analysis was used to understand how participants understood the concept of ‘relationship rules’, and their own experiences of rules and expectations within relationships.

Data analysis continued until recurring themes became apparent, or until no new information was being uncovered (Creswell, 1998).

The data presented in the current study was collected as part of a wider study on relationships, and the resulting data is currently being used to further investigate relationship rules and expectations.

**Results and Discussion**

**Categorising Themes**

To complete the data analysis, the constant comparative process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used in order to decipher the themes. From the initial reading of the transcripts, there were general themes that surfaced. After discussion between the authors about their interpretation of the themes, the transcripts were read again, with a focus on the emerging themes. The constant comparative method involved successive readings of the transcript, each time giving more attention to the revised themes. Using these themes, and informed by previous literature, categories of rules/expectations were derived.

**Definition of a ‘Relationship Rule’**

Participants used a number of words and phrases to describe their meaning and experience of what a ‘relationship rule’ is. Initially, the word ‘boundary’ was offered by the researcher in order not to define the term for participants. Participants themselves clarified this term to mean ‘rule’, and as such, the word ‘rule’ will continue to be used in this paper as a reflection of participants’ experiences.

In further defining these concepts, phrases such as ‘polite behaviour’, ‘hypothetical line’, ‘acceptable behaviour’, ‘expectations’, ‘how far you can go’, ‘agree not to go over’, ‘values’ and ‘rules to conduct one’s relationship’ were used. In examining these themes, there were some common elements. One such element was
the idea that rules provide a way to define and guide behaviour, both for one’s partner and oneself. A second element was that of acceptability or unacceptability. Rules function to make clear to relationship partners what is acceptable behaviour within the relationship, and what is not. The third common element was the idea of agreement. When discussing the existence of rules, participants described them as being agreed upon by relationship partners. This reflects work by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), as well as Elangovan and Shapiro (1998). Thibaut and Kelley (1959), in their discussion of norms and rules, suggest that a norm or behavioural rule is based on agreement, and only exists as a norm if there is some degree of acceptance by both dyad members. In addition, Elangovan and Shapiro (1998), in their model of betrayal, suggest that in order for a transgression of a rule or expectation to occur, expectations must first exist, and be mutually known.

This aspect of agreement was shared by participants, and as one participant stated, ‘And so that boundary is that rule or that agreement or that understanding or that common ground where you say, “Well here is the way I will conduct myself or how I agree to conduct myself within this relationship” ’ (FG5:4)

Rule Structure and Hierarchy

While agreement appeared to be a feature of participants’ definitions of relationship rules, as they explored how rules come to exist, it emerged that rules are not always explicitly discussed and set as rules, however the process of rule-setting is not the focus of the current paper. Participants were able to identify different types of rules, as well as specific topics about which rules exist. Examination of participants’ responses suggests a distinction between explicit and implicit rules. This refers to a basic distinction between rules and expectations that were explicitly discussed or made mention of within the relationship, versus those that were not. Discussion, however, does not necessarily imply agreement, and this relationship between discussion or negotiation and agreement, one which needs to be followed up in future research. Interestingly, more participants referred to instances or examples of what may be termed implicit rules, rather than explicit. These ‘implicit’ rules may be seen to include those rules that are ‘implied’, ‘unspoken’, or exist as ‘expectations’ and ‘assumptions’. The differences between those rules that are made explicit and those that remain implicit is unclear, however they appear to be a reflection of those influences that are particularly salient to the individual.

While there appear to be different types of rules, in terms of explicit versus implicit, it appears that there also exists a hierarchy of rules, in terms of their importance to the relationship. This hierarchy is determine within the relationship, and defines which rules are more important and central to maintaining the unity and integrity of the relationship within the range of rules that exists. In general, rules about issues such as fidelity, respect, support and intimacy were more integral to the cohesion of the dyad than were rules about everyday activities, or time spent in hobbies, for example. As one would expect, participants reported that any violation of the more important rules had more severe consequences for the relationship than the violation of more minor rules. As such, the existence of rules and expectations could be thought of as a hierarchical structure, based on relative importance of the rule to the relationship, which was summarised by one participant as: ‘I think you could almost say there are primary, secondary and tertiary boundaries, you know. Like with some…the primary one is like a fidelity thing, which you just don’t go there, and integrity and stuff like that. Then there’s secondary stuff, financial, and then there’s all the golf...’ (FG2:57).

Types of Rules and Expectations

In discussion of the topics about which rules and expectations might exist, participants typically identified intimate involvement with a third party outside the dyad as the most common. Discussion of this topic elicited a wide range of specific rules that participants identified from within their own relationships, as well as topics about which rules or expectations might exist. Participants’ responses were consistent with many of the rule categories derived from previous research. Both Baxter (1986) and Argyle and Henderson (1984), each suggested their own set of rule categories.

Baxter’s (1986) investigated accounts of relationship break-ups and worked in reverse in an attempt to identify what rules were violated in order for the relationship to end. Argyle and Henderson (1984), in contrast, tried to identify rules that exist within friendships. In both cases, the rule categories or types were derived from qualitative data, as well as theory. Despite the difference in focus of the current study to this previous work, there appears to be some common elements between the rule categories that were derived. Using Baxter’s (1986) and Argyle and Henderson’s (1984) categories, as well as results from the current data set, rule categories were formed, and are summarised in Table 1. As can be seen, there existed rule categories around how emotions (its expression and support) are managed, how time within and outside the relationship is managed, types of behaviour (sexual, social, positive and negative), as well as categories that facilitate the routine of the relationship such as roles, rituals and financial management.

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5 FG denotes focus group participant and number, followed by page number of transcript.
Table 1

**Rule Category Labels and their Features**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Label</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure and Expression</td>
<td>Confiding in each other, disclosing information to each other; sharing information and opinions; the ways views and emotions are expressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help and Support</td>
<td>Giving/receiving emotional support; respect; trust; provision of help and advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty/Fidelity</td>
<td>Being loyal and faithful to each other; about intimate involvement with others outside relationship; loyalty to relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing and Equality</td>
<td>Getting out what you put into the relationship, relative to your partner; repayment of debts (emotional or tasks, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Behaviour</td>
<td>The sexual relationship with your partner; frequency; having needs met/meeting needs; types of sexual behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time with Partner</td>
<td>Amount of time with partner; how this time is spent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time with others</td>
<td>Amount of time spent with others outside relationship; types of activities done with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in tasks</td>
<td>Amount of time spent in work, hobbies or tasks; types of activities or tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Behaviour in Private</td>
<td>Nagging; teasing; criticism; conflict; emotional and physical abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Behaviour in Public</td>
<td>Public criticism and teasing; disclosing confidences to others; ignoring partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Interaction</td>
<td>Respect; positive regard; showing consideration; affection; keeping each other informed of schedules and events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Behaviour</td>
<td>Behaviour in settings outside the relationship: with family, friends, social events, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>Who does what within the relationship; may be physical tasks, tasks around daily living; emotional roles, gender roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>How money is managed and spent, either individual or joint money or both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual Obligations</td>
<td>Acknowledging or celebrating birthdays, anniversaries and other events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-presentation</td>
<td>How each person presents themselves to their partner and to the world; consistency of appearance and behaviour over time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Previous work in this area has not attempted to differentiate between types of rules in relationships, or attempt to understand their structure and use, their importance to the relationship and the differential consequences for violation of different rules. This preliminary classification is somewhat fluid, and individually-based. It is also possible that the status of rules can change. It was interesting to note that participants identified this, and suggested that there are instances when a violation of a ‘tertiary’ rule (which might ordinarily not have serious consequences), might have dire consequences for the relationship if it is repeatedly violated. Therefore the repeated violation of a less important rule can result in an increase in its importance to the relationship if it is repeatedly violated. This structural aspect of rule research is an interesting one which requires further investigation.

The current study initially aimed to explore the concept of ‘relationship rules’: how these are defined, and the types of rules and expectations individuals have in their romantic relationships. From the qualitative data provided by participants, relationship rules are defined as rules or expectations that exist between relationship partners, which set the limits of conduct within a given relationship, and that guide and define what is acceptable behaviour within that relationship in order to maintain its unity and continuance.

From the discussion of the various types of rules that participants could identify, or had personal experience with in their romantic relationships, a number of rule categories were able to be identified. Further to this, participants identified that rules differ in their importance to the relationship, in terms of the level of threat to the relationship if the rule were to be violated. This suggests that relationship rules may form a hierarchical structure. Using the terminology of the participants, this hierarchy may involve primary, secondary, and tertiary rules. Primary rules appeared to typically those rules reflecting fidelity, support, respect and intimacy, and are typically central to maintaining the cohesion and unity of a relationship, while Tertiary rules typically represent rules that play less of a role in maintaining the relationship itself, and are typically more forgivable if violated. This rule structure appears to be flexible, and rules can increase in their importance to the relationship based on the frequency of violation. This proposal of a rule hierarchy, however, requires further research.

The current study aimed to define what a ‘relationship rule’ is, based on the experience of individuals. It attempted to further elucidate specific rule types and rule categories that may exist in romantic relationships. This qualitative study has provided valuable descriptive information about this area which can be used to further
develop our understanding of the form and function of relationship rules, as well as developing a model of how rules and expectations operate within romantic relationships.

References


Minding our Language: Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) Australian Style

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Abstract

Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) teaches communication skills based on Gordon’s (1970) Theory of Healthy Relationships, emphasising that the actual language parents use is a key to relationship improvement and prevention of the problems which arise so frequently in family life. Given the disparity between spoken English in Australia and the US as expressed in the standard PET workbook, Australian instructors had long called for a vernacular workbook, which was developed by Wood (1997) as a foundational part of a doctoral study of PET outcomes in six Australian states (Wood, 2003). The present review looks at the complex task of “translation”, as well as simplification of the text without loss of content, undertaken in the hope of extending its use to less advantaged parents. In a linguistic comparison of the two workbooks, the readability of each was assessed comparing 20 randomly selected pages, including a passage of approximately 75 words from each. On Flesch Reading Ease, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and the Gunning Fog Index the scores for the Australian workbook were significantly lower than those from the standard workbook, indicating considerable improvement in readability.

Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) teaches communication skills based on Gordon’s (1970) Theory of Healthy Relationships, emphasising that the actual language parents use is a key to relationship improvement and prevention of the problems which arise so frequently in family life. The new understanding of emotional development and its importance for families (Goleman, 1996; Gottman, 1997; Prior, Sanson, Smart & Oberklaid, 2000) has highlighted the importance of PET in parent training because it emphasizes emotional awareness and self-regulation in family relationships rather than the teaching of compliance.

From 1983 during the first Australian Conference on Inter-personal Skills at Macquarie University, PET instructors in Australia had been calling for a vernacular version of the PET workbook. The call was re-iterated at similar conferences in 1985 (University of Queensland), 1987 in Melbourne, and at Annual General Meetings of instructors from the separate states from 1989 to 1991, when the Effectiveness Training Institute of Australia Ltd. (ETIA) was launched. The commitment of the Institute to sponsor such a project became reality in 1994, when it was approved by the University of Tasmania, with the Australianising of the PET workbook as a key part of a doctoral comparison study of PET outcomes (Wood, 2003).

There is a considerable cultural difference between the normal use of English in Australia and the United States of America. It has become clear to groups of speakers in Australia that they share a distinct idiom which they all understand, whether or not they themselves use all its variations (Delbridge, 1988). Although they are completely used to the American style through its constant presentation in imported film and television programs, Australians typically prefer their own vernacular, sometimes quite vehemently. PET instructors have usually had to “translate” various words and phrases in the standard workbook (Gordon, 1976) as their courses proceeded, and many have reported complaints about Americanisms contained in the course materials. In 1994, the first author sent out an initial survey to 18 PET instructors from six Australian states including three of the six instructor trainers who were responsible for the teaching and accreditation of those instructors who present PET in this country. All indicated there was a pressing need for an Australian workbook for PET. The reasons cited included differences found particularly in examples of conversation, role-plays and tapes. It was pointed out that Americanisms created irritation and resistance in some parents, and that long sentences and small print explanations were rejected by less educationally advantaged participants.

Development of the Australian Text of the PET Workbook

In 1996, Christine Wood began the work of translating the American text into the Australian vernacular. The aim was to render the wording in such a way that no content was lost, and that the principles of PET, and their expression in operational skills training was undiminished. It was also a priority to retain the complete philosophy behind PET, and its development from its historical and psychological foundations. Approval from Thomas Gordon and his organisation was important for sponsorship from ETIA who held the franchise for Australia, and for the sake of subsequent publication, the format from the most recent printing of the standard US workbook (Gordon, 1976) was preferred. In addition, simplification of the text as far as possible, as well as Australianisation, was a stated aim of the study in order to make it accessible to a broader spectrum of the population, including people from other cultural backgrounds and those with less education. As the work
progressed, it appeared also to be preferable to do a certain amount of “de-psychologising” of the language. Some of the wording, for example “modifying the environment” of family life, has lost its early impact because its premises are now widely accepted, if not well understood. It was produced at a time when new psychological insights into human behaviour were challenging established ways of thinking, and Gordon intentionally set out to follow George Miller who in the sixties had advocated “giving psychology away to the public”. As well as the use of technical terms, the text contained numerous words of Latin origin, which are more American in flavour than the shorter Anglo-Saxon synonyms which Australians (and indeed the British) prefer. Other goals included some updating of terms relating to household equipment and lifestyle, and change to children’s names so that they were Australian rather than American. Table 1 provides an example of the changes made from American to Australian English.

Table 1
Example of Changes from American to Australian English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>US version:</strong> Sometimes in evaluating the solutions already generated, a brand new one will be thought of, better than any of the others, or an earlier one will be improved upon by some suggested modification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australian version:</strong> Sometimes while you’re considering the solutions you’ve got already, a brand new one will come up, better than any of the others, or else one of you will think of a better way of doing one you’ve thought about before (Aus PET Workbook, p. 61).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Readability of the Australian PET Workbook**

Linguistically speaking, the changes reflect far more than the simple substitution elsewhere in the workbook of words like “petrol” for “gas”, “Mum” for “Mom”, and “I’ve got to have the car!” for “I gotta have the car!”; changes which mattered because of instructors’ reports that even minimal Americanisms deflected parents from the point being made in the text in the early sessions. Because PET comprises operational skills training, that is, the emphasis is on understanding the extreme importance of the actual words being used on making changes where necessary, and practising them in class before trying them out on the family, it was crucial to render the text into everyday Australian English. Every care was taken to reflect the nuances of idiomatic speech in a way that was authentically Australian without being jingoistic. The text had to be plain, as simple and up-to-date as possible, taking account of current understanding of psychological ideas, as well as remaining true to Gordon’s concepts and formulas for effective communication. Hence, development of the Australian workbook required a delicate balance, and took a number of months to complete. The revised text was published in 1997.

**Reading Difficulty in Popular Parenting Literature**

Holcomb and Stith (1985) pointed out that while parents were becoming increasingly reliant on books and popular literature for advice on bringing up their children, many were not satisfied with the help they received. It was therefore important that such assistance be couched in terms that were easy to understand. A similar concern was raised (Abram & Dowling, 1979) with a Flesch Reading Ease assessment of 50 available parenting books.

**Indices of Readability**

Readability formulae have long been employed in educational contexts to predict the difficulty some readers will find in various texts. Different formulae have been found to produce different assessments of a single text (Graddol, Cheshire & Swann, 1994), but each formula can be useful in the comparison of two differing versions of the same text, since each offers a consistent approach.

Flesch (1948) produced a formula for assessment of readability of a document, based on four style elements: (1) average sentence length in words; (2) average word length in syllables; (3) average percentage of “personal words”; and (4) average percentage of “personal sentences”. He continued to develop his theory of abstraction, first leaving out the “personal” words and sentences, then attempting to combine and extend statistical analyses of parts of speech in accordance with accepted grammatical classification (Jespersen, 1933), in order to produce a ratio which would estimate the level of comprehension difficulty. He further suggested that ease of comprehension requires a level which is concrete rather than abstract. “...An abstract style contains relatively more descriptive adjectives, indefinite pronouns, and subordinating conjunctions, while a concrete style contains relatively more proper nouns, limiting adjectives, finite verbs, personal pronouns, and co-ordinating conjunctions” (Flesch, 1950, p.384).
Flesch (1950) reported that in an empirical investigation, the percentage of “definite words” in the test passages was correlated with the grade level of the children who answered correctly one half of the test questions. Finally a measure was formulated based on the percentage of definite words and the average word length in syllables, on a scale from 0 (practically unreadable) to 100 (easy for any literate person) together with a detailed set of directions for obtaining it.

The Flesch Reading Ease formula has been one of the most widely used in the history of readability measurement (Holcomb & Stith, 1985; Klare, 1974-75). An extension of the measure to include grade level is the Flesch-Kincaid index in which a level of 7 or 8 is equivalent to a Flesch Reading Ease score of 70-80. Gunning (1972, cited in Klare, 1974-75) proposed the Fog Index which counts “hard words”, those of three syllables or more, and the overall sentence length, and is simpler to apply than the Flesch formula. There have been numerous efforts to apply manual, machine and later computer aids to simplify the application of readability indices to texts (Foulger, 1978; Klare, 1974-75; Coke & Rothkopf, 1970), and they continue to be useful in the assessment of texts for particular purposes (Macdonald-Ross & Scott, 1996; Jones, 1993; Clariana, 1993; Spiegel & Campbell, 1985). The three readability indices discussed above, plus a fourth, the index of passivity, were included in the CorrecText Grammar Correction System (1990) in the User’s Guide for Microsoft Word 5.0 for the Apple Macintosh. In his (1950) study, Flesch suggested that a verb used in the passive voice was more abstract than when used in the active voice.

**Assessing the Readability of the Australian PET Workbook**

Twenty pages from the Australian PET workbook, (Wood, 1997) were randomly selected using SPSS, and a passage of approximately 75 words was also selected randomly from each, in order to compare for readability with the corresponding passages from the standard workbook (Gordon, 1976). Results from the CorrecTest computer assessment showed that on Flesch Reading Ease, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and the Gunning Fog Index the scores for the Australian workbook were significantly lower than those from the standard workbook.

Table 2 shows the scores for each of the reading ease indicators, comparing those found for the standard US workbook with those for the Australian version.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readability Measure</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t (19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of passive sentences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US workbook</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus workbook</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch Reading Ease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US workbook</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus workbook</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>3.94**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch Grade Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US workbook</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus workbook</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US workbook</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus workbook</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.77*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunning Fog Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US workbook</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus workbook</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.25**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p <.05, ** p <.01.

It can be seen from Table 2 that there is a highly significant difference in the mean score for Flesch Reading Ease, with the Australian workbook almost 10 points higher than the US version. The Australian version has a “standard” mean readability score (64.6) while the American workbook mean score (55.1) rates as “fairly
difficult” (Flesch, 1950, p.386). The Flesch Grade level score for the US version is 11.2, showing a highly significant difference from the Australian workbook at 9.4. On the Flesch-Kincaid Grade, the difference is also significant, with the US mean score of 9.7 compared with the Australian mean of 8.4, roughly equivalent to a final year secondary school level compared with mid-secondary. On the Gunning Fog Index, assessing the number of “difficult” words, the Australian version shows a highly significant difference from the original American, the former’s mean (10.7) being substantially lower than the US mean (12.2).

On each of the measures the US workbook shows a greater spread of scores from minimum to maximum occurrence, indicating wider variation in readability and less consistency of style. The Australian version shows a slightly smaller maximum score on four of the five indicators, excluding the level of passivity. While the latter score was lower for the Australian workbook, the difference was not significant. A possible explanation may be that the requirement for a close translation was occasionally more important than that for simplicity.

Four indicators show a significant difference between the two versions of the workbook in favour of the Australian edition, but the differences are not extreme. This reflects the fact that the Australian version was intended to be as close as possible to the standard workbook, retaining the format and omitting none of the concepts, but expressed in a vernacular and simplified form. It would nevertheless be possible for the next edition to attempt a further simplification in accordance with the readability indicators, for example in further reducing incidences of passive voice use.

References

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The Role of Consensus, Distinctiveness, and Consistency in the Context of Psychological Abuse

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Abstract

The Covariation Theory of Kelley (1967) proposes that individuals attribute causes to a person, a stimulus, or circumstances depending on the quality of information. Therefore, individuals who reflect upon the origin of behaviour are influenced by consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness cues. The current study aims to investigate Kelley’s Covariation Theory in light of psychological abuse as a common occurrence among heterosexual and homosexual couples. For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire containing vignettes depicting a psychologically abusive scenario with varying degrees of consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness as well as differing gender composition of the couple (male-male, female-female, female-male abuse) were created. The study recruited 227 university students. Results of this study could not support Kelley’s Covariation Theory. Furthermore, attitudes toward gay men and lesbians do not seem to have a considerable impact on causal attribution. Future research needs to focus on the vignette content, as well as the order in which the stimulus material is presented.

Attribution theory is a theory about how people make causal explanations. Thus, questions beginning with why, their answers, and the decisions people make are central to causal inferences. Attribution in distressed relationships has been of interest to researchers for quite some time. Hence, Harvey and Weary (1984) reported that distressed partners tend to both blame others and acquit themselves from any responsibility for the breakdown of their marriage. Accordingly, Howe (1987) argued that partners in long term distressed relationships develop a blame-focused perspective on the cause of existing conflict. Thus, Fincham and Bradbury (1992) stated that responsibility and blame ascription is more prevalent than is causal attribution among married couples. The researchers concluded that attribution research on interpersonal relationships lacks precision in testing causal explanations for the occurrence of certain behaviours (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). The ascription of blame and responsibility becomes more central to abusive relationships. In fact, causal explanations for abusive behaviour seem unfeasible considering the immediate adverse consequences for the victims.

Although abuse is often initially associated with physical and sexual abuse, psychological abuse constitutes one of the most prevalent forms of maltreatment among couples. The lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework on psychological abuse has made research within the area difficult. Thus, psychological abuse was often referred to as emotional abuse (O’Hearn & Davis, 1997), psychological aggression (Hamby & Sugerman, in print), or psychological distress (Simonelli & Ingram, 1998). Moreover, researchers defined psychological abuse independently with only small proportions overlapping consistently (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000; Hammock & O’Hearn, 2002; O’Hearn & Davis, 1997; Semple, 2001). However, the following definition has been adopted for this study: Psychological abuse is an ongoing pattern of behaviours intending to undermine or destroy a person’s self image and self confidence. Characteristic to psychological abuse are covert and overt behavioural patterns. The former refers to negative labelling, discounting, or threats of abandonment, whereas the latter describes name calling, withholding of affections, threats of violence, or similar behaviours. Psychological abuse excludes any acts of physical harm or force.

Psychological abuse is highly prevalent in interpersonal heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Hornung, McCullough, and Sugimoto (1981) reported an incidence rate of 67.6% among American couples. Further on, Russell and Hulson (1992) found that 88.7% of 53 English married couples reported incidences of psychological abuse. In a study comprising middle aged Australian women, Parker and Lee (2002) found 77% of respondents to have experienced psychological abuse. With regards to homosexual couples, Renzetti (1989) found it to be the most common form of maltreatment among 70% of lesbian women. Furthermore, Landolt and Dutton (1997) reported an equally high incidence (68%) of psychological abuse in 52 American gay couples. Merrill and Wolfe (2002) gave an incidence rate of 74% among American gay and bisexual men. Evidently, the rate of psychological abuse among heterosexual and homosexual couples is almost equal. Incidentally, the number of gay men and lesbians who are willing to admit to their sexual orientation in public is rising. According to the Australian census in 1996, a total of 0.1% or 19722 persons declared themselves part of a same-sex couple (Same-sex couples, n.d.). However, Flood and Hamilton (2005) reported that 35% of the Australian population aged 14 years and over consider homosexuality to be immoral. Moreover, Plummer (2001)
Kelley’s Covariation Theory

found that homophobic labelling already emerges among primary school children. His findings suggested that expressions such as “poofter” or “faggot” comprised part of their vocabulary to insult others. Initially, these expressions had no sexual connotations but later become central to discrimination against gay men. This finding implicated that children acquire a negative stream of thought early in life by utilising homophobic expressions that extend into adolescence. Although negative attitudes toward homosexuals can be acquired at a young age, other factors can positively or negatively mediate the effects of prejudices. Research suggested that interpersonal contact, religion, or gender role beliefs influence whether attitudes toward homosexuals are favourable or unfavourable (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Wills & Crawford, 2000; Louiderback & Whitley, 1997).

The aim of this study was to test whether attribution theory is applicable to heterosexual and homosexual relationships that are overshadowed by psychological abuse. For that purpose, Kelley’s Covariation Theory (1967) was chosen to determine if people take covariation into consideration when making causal attributions. Keeping the above mentioned information on psychological abuse and homosexuality in mind, the following section will describe the Covariation Theory.

Causal attribution refers to the effort people undertake to identify factors that potentially cause an effect to occur. As part of causal attribution, the covariation principle assumes that people attribute the cause of an event to the factor with which it co-varies at the time of its occurrence (Ahn, Kalish, Medin, & Gelman, 1995; Hewstone & Jaspar, 1987; Hilton, Smith, & Alickie, 1988). This assumption represents the building stone Kelley used to formulate a model based on statistical analysis of variance, which is often referred to as the ANOVA model or Covariation Theory (Cheng & Novick, 1992; Försterling, 1992; Kelley, 1967; Kelley & Michela, 1980). Kelley argued that causal attributions are made along the dimensions of persons (P), stimuli (S), times (T), or modalities (M), with the criteria relevant to make causal attributions being consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency information. Whereas consensus means that “attributes of external origin are experienced in the same way by all observers”, distinctiveness describes how “the impression is attributed to the thing if it uniquely occurs when the thing is present and does not occur in its absence”. Furthermore, consistency is described as “each time the thing is present, the individual’s reaction must be the same or nearly so […] must be consistent even though his mode of interaction with the thing varies” (Kelley, 1967, p. 197).

Kelley (1967) predicted that high consensus, high distinctiveness, and high consistency (HHH) are associated with stimulus attributions. In contrast, a combination characterised by low consensus, low distinctiveness, and high consistency (LLH) is attributed to factors internal to the person (Kelley, 1967; McArthur, 1972; van Overwalle, 1997). Furthermore, it was hypothesised that a pattern of low consensus, high distinctiveness, and low consistency (LHL) will result in circumstance attribution (Cheng & Novick, 1990). Hilton, Smith, and Alickie (1988) found that properties of the stimulus are explained by consensus information and person properties by distinctiveness clues. These propositions have found support several times in research on attribution theory (Eyre, 2000; Försterling, 1992; Hazlewood & Olson, 1986; Hersketh, 1984; McArthur, 1972).

In conclusion, the hypotheses are:

1. That there is a difference in causal attribution as a function of covariation information in the vignette;
2. That consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency have an effect on perpetrator, victim, and circumstance information, respectively;
3. That there is a difference in causal attribution as a function of the gender composition of the couple in the vignette; and
4. That negative attitudes toward homosexuals will lead to different causal attributions as a function of the gender composition of the couple.

Method

Participants

One hundred and eighty nine females and thirty eight males from James Cook University participated in this study. Participants were aged between 17 and 61, with a mean age of 27.2 years. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions in the 3 (gender composition condition: male-female vs. male-male vs. female-female) x 2 (consensus: high vs. low) x 2 (distinctiveness: high vs. low) x 2 (consistency: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design. To measure attribution toward the victim, the perpetrator, and the circumstances, questionnaires with 24 different vignettes were designed. Subjects were asked to read the vignette carefully before they answered 18 questions to the scenario. Attribution scores were measured on a 4-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The questionnaire further included measures on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, gender role beliefs, and demographic characteristics.
Results

No serious violations of the assumptions of normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multicollinearity, were found.

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate the effects of covariation information on causal attribution by controlling for the gender composition condition. No statistically significant differences at a p<.05 level for victim, perpetrator, or circumstance attribution scores were obtained for the groups (see Figure 1), $F(7, 219) = 1.253, p = .275$, $F(7, 219) = 1.809, p = .087$, and $F(7, 219) = 1.243, p = .28$, respectively.

Figure 1. Victim, perpetrator, and circumstance attribution scores as a function of covariation information.

Furthermore, independent-samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether covariation information would be utilised by participants in accordance with Kelley’s predictions that high consensus is related to stimulus attribution, low distinctiveness to person attribution, and low consistency with circumstance attribution. Thus it was possible to evaluate the impact of the manipulation of consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency information on causal attribution. There was no statistically significant effect between high and low consensus on perpetrator attribution scores, $t(225) = -0.08, p = .936$. A statistically significant effect was found for high ($M = 8.56, SD = 2.23$) and low ($M = 7.95, SD = 2.36$) distinctiveness information, $t(225) = 1.99, p = .048$. The magnitude of the difference in the means was small (eta squared = .02). No statistically significant effect was found for consistency information on circumstance attribution, $t(225) = 1.179, p = .858$.

Furthermore, a one-way between-group multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate the effects of the gender composition of the couple in the vignette on causal attribution. There was no statistically significant difference between the male-female, male-male, or female-female condition for the combined dependent variables: $F(6, 444) = 2.114, p = .051$; Wilks’ Lambda = .945; partial eta squared = .028. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, no statistically significant effect was observed using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .017.

A one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to compare causal attribution to victim, perpetrator, and circumstances for the three different gender conditions in the vignette. The independent variable was the gender composition of the couple. Attitudes toward homosexual men and women scores were used as the covariates in this analysis. Results showed no significant result was found for the groups on the combined variables: $F(6, 440) = 1.891, p = .081$; Wilks’ Lambda = .95; partial eta squares = .025.

Discussion

The current findings add to a variety of areas within attribution research. Until now, little was known about the use of covariation information in interpersonal attribution as specified by Kelley (1967). Furthermore, it was unclear what role consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency play in helping people to make decisions in difficult situations. The results of this study did not support Kelley’s proposition that HHH (high consensus, high distinctiveness, and high consistency) leads to stimulus attribution, LHL to person attribution, and LHL to circumstance attribution. Precisely, no effect was detected across all possible eight combinations of covariation information. Hersketh (1984) found similar results in a field study that tested the external validity of covariation information to success and failure among unemployed people. Despite finding support for Kelley’s model in a laboratory study about people’s success and failure in job seeking, these findings could not be replicated in interviews with unemployed volunteers. Furthermore, Fincham and Bradbury (1992) noted that attribution theories might not be applicable to interpersonal relationships.

However, Kelley’s theory was developed primarily to highlight the influence of covariation information on causal attribution and did not take into account interindividual differences, experiences, or emotions.
Nevertheless, results of this study do not suggest that people rely on consensus, distinctiveness, or consistency information at all. In fact, Kelley (1967) predicted that low distinctiveness was related to person attribution. Results however indicate that it is high distinctiveness that made people attribute to the victim in the scenario more often. Kelley acknowledged the shortcomings of his theory in a discussion on errors and illusions in attribution. Thus, Walster (1966, as cited in Kelley) stated that the perception of more negative consequences will increase the tendency to hold the person accountable who appears to be responsible. In this study, the perpetrator appears to be most likely to be responsible for the abuse despite covariation information. A further possible explanation for the lack of an effect for consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency information is the saliency of the stimulus presented. Despite reviewing the vignettes on several occasions it might be plausible to assume that the saliency of the difference was not apparent to participants in this study. Hence, consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency information might have not been salient enough to have allowed participants using them accordingly.

Furthermore, no difference was found for attribution toward the victim, the circumstances, and the perpetrator for different gender compositions of the couple. The same holds true for the effects attitudes toward gay men and lesbian have on causal attribution. However, sample characteristics have to be considered to interpret this result. Because the majority of participants studied psychology, it might be plausible to assume that they are more sensitive to social inequalities and thus more tolerant toward gay men and lesbians in comparison to other sample populations.

From a methodological point of view, the order of the presentation of covariation information could have contributed to increased perpetrator attribution. Hilton, Smith, and Alicke (1988) proposed that information about the stimulus is derived from consensus information. The vignettes for the questionnaire were designed to present distinctiveness information first followed by consensus and distinctiveness information. Measures to test the covariation principle in the past have generally been short statements (Cheng & Novick, 1990; Hersketh, 1984; McArthur, 1972). However, the vignettes in this study were of an average length of 150 words. Thus, participants were confronted with condensed information. It could be assumed that the amount of information was difficult to process. In particular, if people have had experiences with any form of psychological abuse they are less likely to judge the situation objectively. For that reason, more research is needed to determine the use of covariation information in everyday interactions.

In conclusion, sample considerations, presentation of information, and saliency of the stimuli are potential confounds in this study. Furthermore, it was uncertain to what extent attribution theories are applicable to interpersonal relationship scenarios that are marked by psychological abuse. Evidently, no support could be found for the assumption that Kelley’s model is a valid predictor for causal attribution.

References


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