

Instrumentalness and Expressiveness: Predictors of Heterosexual Relationship Satisfaction

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The purpose of this study was to identify the extent to which stage of relationship development moderated the link between instrumentalness, expressiveness, and relationship satisfaction. Three hundred ninety three subjects indicated that they were either casually dating, seriously dating, or engaged. Results revealed that although relationship stage predicted satisfaction for both males and females, it did not interact significantly with instrumentalness and expressiveness and thus, did not serve a moderating function. Results also indicated that for males, self-perceptions of instrumentalness and expressiveness, as well as partner's perceived expressiveness predicted relationship satisfaction. For females, partner's perceived instrumentalness and expressiveness significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. Discussion centered on the different findings for males and females, and on implications for future research concerning the influence of instrumentalness and expressiveness on dyadic interaction.

Recent research has begun to suggest that instrumentalness and expressiveness may play an important role in the development and maintenance of satisfying interpersonal relationships. Specifically, it has been proposed that individuals who perceive themselves to be both instrumental and expressive (i.e., androgynous) will be more likely to initiate and maintain satisfying relationships than those individuals who are characterized as

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only instrumental or expressive (e.g., Ickes & Barnes, 1978). This proposition is based on the premise that androgynous individuals can use their instrumental abilities to initiate interactions and their expressive abilities to attend to the cues and responses of others, thereby promoting satisfying interpersonal exchanges.

Research designed specifically to test this proposition focused on initial dyadic interactions between same-sex and opposite-sex strangers. The results of these studies revealed that in general, the highest levels of behavioral interaction, interpersonal attraction, and satisfaction occurred in dyads in which at least one of the individuals was androgynous (Ickes & Barnes, 1978; Ickes, Schermer, & Steeno, 1979; Lamke & Bell, 1982). These results provide initial support for the proposition that satisfying interactions between individuals involve the application and synthesis of both instrumental and expressive capabilities.

More recent research has focused on the relationship between instrumentalness, expressiveness, and satisfaction within marriage (Antill, 1983; Baucom & Aiken, 1984; Davidson & Sollie, 1987; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986, Lamke, 1989; Murstein and Williams, 1983). Although the findings from these studies are somewhat contradictory, the most consistent finding is that a high level of marital satisfaction is associated with high levels of expressiveness for both husbands and wives. In other words, husbands and wives who perceive themselves to be expressive and/or perceive their spouse to be expressive, tend to report higher levels of marital satisfaction than do individuals married to spouses with low levels of expressiveness.

It is evident from this brief summary of relevant research that there is a discrepancy between what predicts satisfaction for individuals interacting for the first time and what predicts satisfaction for married couples. Ickes (1985) has addressed this inconsistency in his model of gender role influences on dyadic interaction by proposing that relationship type (i.e., intimate vs. non-intimate) is an important moderating variable in determining the extent to which instrumentalness and/or expressiveness contribute to relationship satisfaction. Specifically, Ickes (1985, p. 202) modified his conceptual model by postulating that, "In intimate relationships..., the degree of satisfaction that dyad members experience regarding their relationship will vary directly with the degree to which they perceive their partners to be nurturant and emotionally responsive and supportive" (i.e., high in expressiveness).

While this hypothesis has clear implications for predicting marital satisfaction, it does not provide information concerning the link between expressiveness, instrumentalness, and satisfaction as couples move through the relationship stages typically associated with the mate selection process (i.e., casual dating, serious dating, and engagement). According to Braiker

and Kelley (1979), the relationship development process is characterized by three stages which include casual dating, serious dating, and engagement. He suggests that during the casual dating stage, interactions are characterized as being tentative and superficial. As couples enter the serious dating stage a shift occurs and couples are likely to report a feeling of love and a sense of belongingness. The engagement stage is characterized as similar to the serious dating stage. The only difference between these two stages is that engaged couples have publicly declared their intent to marry.

Because casual dating is characterized as tentative and superficial, it is expected that both instrumentalness and expressiveness will predict satisfaction in the first stage of relationship development. As relationships progress to more intimate stages such as serious dating and engagement, there is an expectation that there will be more in-depth sharing of feelings and experiences (Milardo, Johnson, & Huston, 1983). This expectation that the relationship will become more intimate will result in partners' perceived expressiveness being important for satisfaction in the serious dating and engaged stages of the relationship development process. Given these differences across the mate selection process, the purpose of the present study was to identify whether or not stage of relationship moderates the extent to which instrumentalness and expressiveness contribute to satisfaction in dating relationships.

METHOD

Subjects

The total sample was comprised of 541 students enrolled in eight lower level family and child development courses at a large southern university. Three hundred ninety three students indicated that they were in a dating relationship and that they would be completing the questionnaire as it pertained to that relationship. The remaining 138 students filled out the questionnaire relative to either a marital or a best friend relationship. For the purpose of this study, only the students in a dating relationship were considered.

The 393 subjects (122 males, 271 females) ranged in age from 18 to 27 with a mean of 19.94. Length of relationship ranged from 1 month to 8 years 3 months, with a mean of 1 year 4.4 months. The diversity of subjects was extensive in that more than 52 different majors were represented in the sample.

One hundred sixty-five subjects (66 males, 99 females), indicated that they were casually dating. The mean age of casual daters was 19.8 (range

18 to 27) and the mean length of relationship was 9.42 months (range 1 month to 8 years 3 months). Two hundred three students (52 males, 151 females) responded that they were seriously dating. The mean age for serious daters was 19.8 with a range of 18 to 25 years. The mean length of relationship was 1 year 7 1/2 months (range 1 month to 7 years). Twenty-five individuals (4 males, 21 females) were engaged. The mean age for the engaged subjects was 20 years (range 18 to 23). These subjects had been in their relationship an average of 3 years 1 month (range 1 year to 6 years 7 months).

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered on the first day of class to all students in attendance. The questionnaire consisted of several measures including: (a) The Personal Attributes Questionnaire Short Form (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975), (b) The Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), and (c) a demographic sheet. The time needed to complete the questionnaire was approximately 25 minutes.

Students were asked to participate in this study so that more could be learned about close relationships. To insure anonymity, the students were asked not to put their name or identification number on the questionnaire. They were told to read all directions carefully and respond as honestly as possible. Students who had completed the questionnaire in another class were asked not to fill out a second one.

Independent Variables

Instrumentalness and Expressiveness

The Personal Attributes Questionnaire Short Form (PAQ) (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) was used to operationalize the concepts of instrumentalness and expressiveness. The PAQ Short Form includes an M scale (instrumentalness) and F scale (expressiveness), each consisting of eight items. Subjects are asked to rate, on a five point Likert-type scale, the extent to which each item characterizes themselves and their dating partner. The response choices range from 1, not at all characteristic, to 5, very characteristic. The total for each scale is obtained by adding the scores for the eight items on the scale. Research indicates that the PAQ Short Form has both construct and predictive validity as a measure of instrumental and expressive attributes (Helmreich, Spence, & Wilhelm, 1981; Spence, 1979).

Stage of Relationship

A single item question was used to operationalize the stage of heterosexual relationship development. Subjects were asked to indicate if they were casually dating, seriously dating, or engaged. According to Braiker and Kelley (1979) these are the three universal stages of the heterosexual relationship development process.

Dependent Variable

Relationship Satisfaction

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988) was used to operationalize relationship satisfaction. The seven item Likert-scale instrument was designed to be a generic measure of relationship satisfaction. Because the items are broad in scope they can be applied to a variety of relationships including dating relationships. The seven items are added together to obtain a total score. Evidence of internal consistency ($\alpha = .86$), construct validity, and predictive validity are provided by Hendrick (1988).

RESULTS

In order to determine whether or not the relationship between instrumentalness, expressiveness, and satisfaction varies as a function of relationship stage, moderated multiple regression was performed. The moderated multiple regression technique (Saunders, 1956) assesses whether the interactions between the moderating variable (relationship stage), and the predictor variables (instrumentalness and expressiveness) significantly add to the prediction of relationship satisfaction. A significant increase in R^2 when the four interaction terms are added to a regression equation that already includes subjects' instrumentalness and expressiveness, partners' perceived instrumentalness and expressiveness, and relationship stage, would indicate that the relationship between satisfaction and instrumentalness and expressiveness varies across the three relationship development stages. This moderated multiple regression approach provides the most unbiased and statistically powerful test of the moderating variable hypothesis (Bissonnette, Ickes, Bernstein, & Knowles, 1990).

In addition to the moderated regression analyses, squared semipartial correlations were computed to determine the unique contribution of each independent variable to the total variance accounted for in relationship

Table I. Relationship Satisfaction Means and Standard deviations (SD) for Casual Daters, Serious Daters, and Engaged Subjects by Sex

Group	Total	Males	Females
Casual daters			
<i>n</i>	156 ^a	64	92
Mean	23.48	22.22	24.36
SD	5.06	5.16	4.83
Serious daters			
<i>n</i>	194 ^b	48	146
Mean	29.75	28.85	30.04
SD	3.85	3.62	3.88
Engaged			
<i>n</i>	25	4	21
Mean	31.36	29.73	31.67
SD	4.56	4.57	4.61

^a*n* was reduced from 165 to 156 due to missing data.

^b*n* was reduced from 203 to 194 due to missing data.

satisfaction. All analyses were done for male and female subjects separately. Relationship satisfaction means and standard deviations for each relationship stage are presented in Table I.

Males

For males, results of the correlation analysis indicated that subjects' expressiveness ($r = .31, p < .0006$), partners' perceived instrumentalness ($r = .23, p < .01$) and perceived expressiveness ($r = .36, p < .0001$), and relationship stage ($r = .59, p < .0001$) significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction. The results of the multiple regression revealed that subjects' instrumentalness and expressiveness, partners' perceived expressiveness, and relationship stage significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. The total variance accounted for by the five independent variables of subjects' instrumentalness and expressiveness, partners' perceived instrumentalness and expressiveness, and relationship stage was $R^2 = .50$ (.47 adjusted), $F(5,109) = 21.44, p < .0001$. The addition of the four interaction terms resulted in a significant regression equation, $R^2 = .51$ (.47 adjusted), $F(9,105) = 12.14, p < .0001$. However, the inclusion of the four interaction terms did not result in a significant increase in variance explained in satisfaction, $F(4,104) = .745, p > .05$. Finally, as indicated by the semipartial

Table II. Relative Contributions of Subjects' Instrumentalness/Expressiveness, Partners' Instrumentalness/Expressiveness, and Relationship Stage to Satisfaction for Males and Females

Variable	Beta	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>sr</i> ²
Males (<i>n</i> = 114)				
Subjects' instrumentalness	-.2299	-3.24	<.002	.048
Subjects' expressiveness	.1996	2.88	<.005	.038
Partners' instrumentalness	.0933	1.32	n.s.	
Partners' expressiveness	.3007	4.23	<.0001	.083
Relationship stage	.5032	7.09	<.0001	.233
Females (<i>n</i> = 255)				
Subjects' instrumentalness	.0897	1.93	n.s.	
Subjects' expressiveness	-.0419	-.82	n.s.	
Partners' instrumentalness	.1618	3.45	<.0006	.025
Partners' expressiveness	.4172	8.44	<.0001	.149
Relationship stage	.4037	8.49	<.0001	.150

correlations presented in Table II, relationship stage accounted for the greatest amount of unique variance in satisfaction.

Females

The results of the correlations for females indicated that all five variables correlated significantly with relationship satisfaction (instrumentalness, $r = .20$, $p < .001$, expressiveness, $r = .20$, $p < .001$; partners' perceived instrumentalness, $r = .22$, $p < .0003$, partners' perceived expressiveness, $r = .53$, $p < .0001$, and relationship stage, $r = .52$, $p < .0001$). The results of the multiple regression indicated that partners' perceived instrumentalness and expressiveness as well as relationship stage contributed significantly to relationship satisfaction. The five independent variables together accounted for 48% (47% adjusted) of the variability in relationship satisfaction, $F(5,250) = 45.84$, $p < .0001$. As was the case for males, the addition of the four interaction terms to the regression equation, ($R^2 = .49$ (.47 adjusted), $F(9,246) = 25.86$, $p < .0001$) did not increase the amount of variance explained in relationship satisfaction $F(4,245) = .9524$, $p > .05$. The calculation of squared semipartial correlations revealed that partners' perceived expressiveness and relationship stage accounted for equal amounts of variance in relationship satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study serve to clarify the link between instrumentalness, expressiveness, and relationship satisfaction in ongoing dating relationships. Previous attempts to test specific propositions concerning gender role influences on dyadic interactions have focused predominantly on either interactions between strangers or on satisfaction within marital relationships. The present findings provide specific evidence not only about the role of instrumentalness and expressiveness in actual dating relationships but also whether or not this role varies as a function of relationship stage.

The results indicate that instrumentalness and expressiveness affect individuals' levels of satisfaction within dating relationships. The results also reveal that relationship stage did not serve a moderating function between instrumentalness, expressiveness, and satisfaction for individuals in dating relationships. That is, whether an individual was casually dating, seriously dating, or engaged did not seem to affect the extent to which instrumentalness and expressiveness predicted relationship satisfaction.

Results for females indicated that partners' perceived instrumentalness and expressiveness, as well as relationship stage, predicted relationship satisfaction. The squared semipartial correlations revealed that partners' perceived expressiveness and relationship stage contributed equally to the prediction of satisfaction, and together, accounted for approximately 30% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. Given the small number of engaged females, these findings suggest that females who perceive themselves to be in a serious rather than casual relationship, and who perceive their partner to be higher rather than lower in expressiveness, are most likely to be satisfied in their dating relationships.

In contrast to the results for females, the findings for males indicated that subjects' instrumentalness, expressiveness, partners' perceived expressiveness, and relationship stage all predicted satisfaction. An examination of the squared semipartial correlations reveals a great deal of variation in the amount of variance accounted for by each of the significant variables. Subjects' instrumentalness and expressiveness accounted for the smallest amount of variance in satisfaction, 5% and 4%, respectively. Partners' perceived expressiveness explained slightly more than 8% of the variance in satisfaction and relationship stage accounted for approximately 23% of the variance in satisfaction. The importance of partners' perceived expressiveness for males' satisfaction is consistent with the research that indicates males are most attracted to dating protocols that are high in expressiveness (Kurlik & Harackiewicz, 1979; Orlofsky, 1982; Pursell & Banikiotes, 1978). It is also consistent with the findings for females in the present study. That

is, regardless of relationship stage, partners' perceived expressiveness was predictive of satisfaction. Unlike the results for females, however, relationship stage accounted for more variance in satisfaction than did partner's perceived expressiveness. Because there were only four engaged males, this finding essentially means that males who believed they were in a serious dating relationship were significantly more satisfied than were males who characterized their relationship as casual dating.

In summary then, of the four instrumentality/expressiveness variables that were assessed, partner's perceived expressiveness predicted the most variance in satisfaction for both males and females. This finding, taken in conjunction with the results of the moderated regression analyses which indicated that relationship stage did not serve as a moderating variable, has potential implications for clarifying the results of this study with regard to Ickes' model of gender role influence. Specifically, these results suggest that what may be important in understanding the influence of gender roles on dyadic interaction is the extent to which individuals expect or anticipate that a relationship will be intimate and not whether or not the relationship is actually intimate. A review of the actual wording of Ickes' propositions reveals that the distinction between an intimate and non-intimate relationship is based on whether or not there are "mutual expectations...[of a] high level of nurturance and emotional support" (Ickes, 1985, p. 202). Thus, if people undertake dating relationships with the generalized expectation that the relationship will be intimate, then according to Ickes' model, one would expect partners' perceived expressiveness to significantly predict satisfaction across relationship development stages. If this were the case, the findings of the present study would be consistent with predictions based on Ickes' model.

Another potential explanation for the lack of moderating effects for relationship stage is that there may not be enough variation in levels of intimacy across casual, serious, and engaged relationships, for stage of relationship to moderate the effects of expressiveness and instrumentality on relationship satisfaction. Examples of intimate and non-intimate relationships according to Ickes' (1985) model were respectively, marriage or cohabitation, and strangers, acquaintances, or casual friends. Clearly, there is likely to be a greater range of intimacy between these types of relationships than between different types of dating relationships. Thus, the possible restricted range of intimacy levels in dating relationships may account for the failure to find moderating effects for relationship stage.

It is evident from this discussion that the concepts of intimate and non-intimate need to be defined more clearly before an actual test of Ickes' model of gender role influence can be made. The results of this study suggest that one means of further clarifying these terms would be to empiri-

cally assess whether or not dating relationships, in general, are perceived to be intimate. In order to assess this possibility, research is needed that focuses on perceptions of intimacy across a wide range of relationship types. By asking a large group of subjects to rate the expected intimacy level of relationships between strangers, acquaintances, business contacts, casual friends, best friends, casual daters, serious daters, engaged couples, and cohabiting and married couples, it would be possible to determine empirically whether the three stages of relationship development fall into the non-intimate or intimate range.

Another important research focus would be to assess the relationship between instrumentalness, expressiveness, satisfaction, and actual intimacy in ongoing dating relationships. In describing intimate relationships, Ickes refers specifically to levels of nurturance and emotional support in relationships. Thus, by assessing these aspects of ongoing relationships, it would be possible to identify dating relationships along a continuum ranging from non-intimate to intimate.

In addition to focusing more specifically on the concept of intimacy, further research is needed with larger samples to determine whether the findings are unique to this sample or whether they can be replicated in other studies. Particular attention needs to be directed toward obtaining a larger sample of engaged individuals in order to provide a more powerful assessment of the link between instrumentalness, expressiveness, and relationship satisfaction during the engagement stage. Longitudinal research which includes both relationship partners would provide a more accurate determination of the extent to which instrumentalness and expressiveness differentially predict satisfaction in relationships. Finally, the paucity of conceptual models available to direct gender role research makes it particularly important that research efforts continue to be guided by extant theoretical models of gender role influence. Such efforts would provide a more systematic assessment of the extent to which instrumentalness and expressiveness impact the relationship development process.

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