

# PERSONALITY TRAITS DIFFERENCES IN YOUNG PEOPLE OPTING FOR ONLINE VS. TRADITIONAL DATING

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**Abstract:** *The young generation is using new digital tools in many aspects of their life, dating being no exception. Ninety participants (mean age 22.16, SD= 1.71) were tested for dating anxiety, level of extraversion, self-esteem, sensitivity to rejection and satisfaction in couple. The group that used online apps to enter a relationship were more extroverted, less anxious for dating and more satisfied in their relations than those using traditional dating. No differences were found in the self-esteem level and sensitivity to rejection. Given that sensitivity to rejection is a predictor for dating anxiety, implications for designing interventions are discussed.*

**Key words:** *dating apps, self-esteem, dating anxiety, sensitivity to rejection.*

## 1. Introduction

Social relationships are being reconfigured and renewed through the Internet. Research suggests that the Internet expands social capital, renews old friendships, broadens political campaigns, and makes individuals more accessible to the public and to each other. The Internet can also reconfigure strong bonds - the relationships of people who are physically closest and emotionally intimate, such as married couples and life partners. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of the Internet in establishing and maintaining close personal relationships using specific populations and case studies (Hogan & Dutton, 2011). Accessibility of the Internet via mobile devices, access to online social networks and online meetings has affected how people meet with future life partners, but little is known about the prevalence or results of these marriages or the demographic of those involved.

Online meetings refer to the use of websites or online apps for the purpose of finding romantic short or long-term partners. The websites operate by requesting users to create their profiles and then connect them with the databases of potential partners, offering suggestions of potential partners by using compatibility algorithms, and allowing users to select their partners (Toma, 2015). A study from 2013 (Cacioppo et al.,

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2013) indicates that more than one-third of marriages in America now begin online. Additionally, marriages that began online, compared to those that began through the traditional offline method, were slightly less likely to result in marital separation or divorce and were associated with slightly higher marital satisfaction among the respondents who remained married.

Another line of research focused on the relationship between personality traits and the propensity to use online dating websites. The purpose of the present research is to investigate how personality traits, self-esteem and satisfaction in couple differ between persons who initiate their relationship online vs. traditionally.

## **2. Personality Traits and Dating Apps**

Studies have shown that extraversion, openness to experience and neuroticism positively predict the use of online apps. Extraversion has been found to be the most powerful predictor of the use of social sites (Clemens et al., 2015; Coreea et al., 2010).

According to Gatter and Hodkinson (2016), despite stereotypes about those who use different types of applications or meeting sites, psychological research on user characteristics is actually very limited and no scientific study has yet examined the individual characteristics of the users of the "Tinder" app. In their study self-esteem and sociability of the Tinder app did not differ from persons who do not use the app, but their age was younger and sexual permissiveness higher than in nonusers.

Self-esteem was viewed from several perspectives: as a basic human need, according to "Maslow's pyramid" and explained by Mbuva (2016) as an important step to achieve self-actualization, as a monitor of social relations, according to "sociometric theory" (Liu, & Zhang, 2016), and as a mediator of anxiety, according to "terror management theory" (Zhang et al., 2019). Self-esteem involves feelings of self-respect and self-disappointment, in contrast to excessive self-respect that characterizes narcissistic individuals (Orth & Robins, 2014). Robinson and Cameron (2012) reported that people with lower self-esteem and their partners have lower satisfaction and commitment than those couples with higher self-respect. AnKee and Yazdanifard (2015) mentioned that people tend to create an ideal image of their potential partner and online dating is more deceiving in this regard, so many of the online initiated relations tend to have shorter duration because when encountering the partner reality contradict expectation. Given this information is not a surprise that online dating encourages people with lower self-esteem as they can mimic a more self-confident person or do not feel pressed to continue a relationship that is not as imagined.

Rejection sensitivity is a predisposition, which consists of anxious anticipation, salience to disapproval signs and exaggerated response to rejection. Anxious anticipation refers to the presumption that someone will be rejected in the future. Two other components of rejection sensitivity are the tendency to easily perceive or react to rejection (Normansell & Wisco, 2017). The sensitivity to rejection can cause people to adopt a more cautious approach to social interaction and can influence the probability of seeing new or less familiar faces. Blackhart and others (2014) stipulated that the sensitivity to rejection was the only predictive dispositional variable of the use of online meeting

sites, revealing that those with higher sensitivity to rejection have more chances to use online meeting sites than those with lower rejection sensitivity. In the same line of research dating anxiety was also investigated. The anxiety experienced in dating situations may be to some extent the result of the negative consequences anticipated by an individual, which are caused by deficits in the social skills necessary for the successful interactions of the romantic meetings. As a result, dating anxiety can prevent many young adults from establishing romantic partnerships (Adamczyk & Segrin, 2016). If someone expects to be rejected because of their physical or sexual appearance or function, it is more likely to respond negatively to the partner and finally to meet their initial expectations, of being rejected. Thus, dating anxiety and sensitivity to rejection are important variables that can predict failure in the approach to intimacy and quality of relations (Frank, 2018).

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Objective and hypotheses**

The objective of this correlational study is to identify differences at the individual and couple level for people who are in relationships formed through traditional, offline methods and those formed through online dating sites or applications. Demographic factors, extraversion, self-esteem, rejection sensitivity, dating anxiety, and relationship satisfaction are used to demonstrate differences. We formulated six hypotheses as follows:

H1: People who developed relationships through online dating apps have a higher level of extraversion than those who formed relationships in a traditional manner.

H2: Self-esteem levels differ between individuals who have developed traditional partnerships and those who have formed relationships using dating apps.

H3: There are differences in rejection sensitivity between two groups of respondents: those in traditional relationships and those in relationships formed through dating apps.

H4: Participants whose relationships began through dating apps have lower levels of dating anxiety than participants in traditional partnerships.

H5: Participants whose relationships began through dating apps have a higher level of couple satisfaction than participants in traditional relationships.

H6: Rejection sensitivity predicts dating anxiety.

#### **3.2. Instruments and participants**

Five questionnaires were used to measure the variables studied in this research. The extraversion instrument is part of "The international personality item pool," which was developed in 1996 and has grown in popularity since its publication, being developed by combining empirical, rational, and psychometric methods. To reduce the possible bias of a directed, accept or reject response set, approximately half of the items are negatively written, and reverse scored (Socha et al., 2010). In the initial study, the Alpha Cronbach coefficient was 0.87. In our study, the Alpha Cronbach coefficient is 0.90.

"The State Self-Esteem Scale" was used to evaluate self-esteem, modifying the instruction to be able to measure self-esteem as a characteristic, with participants answering questions based on how they generally feel about circumstances rather than how they feel in the moment (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). The internal consistency of the scale in the present study is .92. The "Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire" consists of 18 items that measure sensitivity to rejection to the extent that people with high scores are concerned about the outcome and expect an unfavorable result. The psychometric quality of the scale shows that the questionnaire is a trustworthy measure of the anxious components and rejection expectancies of rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996), with an Alpha Cronbach of .93 in the present study.

The fourth instrument is the "Dating anxiety scale," which consists of 23 items quantified on a seven-point Likert scale and divided into three subscales: passive contact, active dating goals, and dating encounters (Calvert et al., 1987). The scale has good psychometric qualities, with the Alpha Cronbach coefficient varying from .89 to .96 for the studied population. The final scale was "The Couples Satisfaction Index," a 32-item scale designed to assess relationship satisfaction. The scale has a range of items with varying scales and response styles. "The Couples Satisfaction Index" has been found to have superior measurement precision and power to detect differences in satisfaction levels when compared to other scales evaluating the same construct (Funk & Rogge, 2007) and a high internal consistency of .96.

The research sample included 90 participants, age between 18 and 27 years ( $M=22.16$ ,  $SD=1.71$ ), divided into two heterogeneous groups based on convenience. The first group consisted of 44 participants who were in traditional partnerships, and the second group consisted of 46 responders who were in relationships developed with the use of online dating apps.

An online Google form was used to collect data. Participants were recruited through social media, and they accessed the survey via a link, providing their permission to participate before answering it. The answers were anonymous, and confidentiality was ensured. The research did not involve any risk for the participants, they could stop submitting the answers at any time.

#### 4. Results

Extraversion, self-esteem, rejection sensitivity, and dating anxiety are normally distributed, symmetric, and mesokurtic, according to Table 1. Couple satisfaction, on the other hand, is not normally distributed, with symmetry of -1.01, being negatively skewed and mesokurtic.

*Descriptive statistics*

Table 1

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewn ess</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Extraversion</i>	90	13	50	34.61	8.52	-0.24	-0.31
<i>Self-esteem</i>	90	44	99	76.20	13.65	-0.39	-0.70
<i>Sensitivity to rejection</i>	90	18	80	42.48	14.16	0.57	-0.44

<i>Dating anxiety</i>	90	23	142	72.37	30.25	0.21	-0.99
<i>Passive contact</i>	90	7	40	18.49	8.11	0.78	-0.15
<i>Active dating intentions</i>	90	8	51	24.31	10.48	0.27	-0.90
<i>Dating interactions</i>	90	8	55	29.87	14.11	0.21	-1.21
<i>Satisfaction in the couple</i>	90	89	142	137.32	20.08	-1.01	0.04

An Independent Samples t-test was used to test hypotheses 1–5, with the findings shown in Table 2.

Mean differences between online vs. traditional dating Table 2

<b>Variable</b>	<i>Traditional relationships</i>		<i>Relationships formed through dating apps</i>		<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Cohen's d</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>				
<i>Extraversion</i>	32.64	9.05	36.50	7.60	-2.19	88	0.03	0.47
<i>Self-esteem</i>	74.45	14.41	77.87	12.81	-1.18	88	0.23	0.25
<i>Sensitivity to rejection</i>	44.93	13.22	40.13	14.77	1.62	88	0.10	0.34
<i>Dating anxiety</i>	83.63	25.98	61.85	30.56	3.59	88	0.001	0.75
<i>Passive contact</i>	21.00	8.09	16.09	7.45	2.99	88	0.004	0.63
<i>Active dating intentions</i>	27.82	9.12	20.96	10.69	3.26	88	0.002	0.69
<i>Dating interactions</i>	34.55	12.37	24.80	14.15	3.46	88	0.001	0.73
<i>Satisfaction in the couple</i>	130.3	22.09	143.96	15.47	-3.36	88	0.001	0.71

The first hypothesis was confirmed by the current data, with a substantial difference between the two groups of participants, those who are in relationships initiated through dating apps having a greater level of extraversion. The results for the second hypothesis were not statistically significant. Thus, there was no significant difference in self-esteem between the two groups. The results for the third hypothesis were not statistically significant, as there was no significant difference in sensitivity to rejection between the two groups. In terms of dating anxiety, the current data confirm the hypothesis that participants whose relationships were formed through dating apps have a lower level than those in traditional relationships. The assumption was also confirmed for the three subscales. The fifth hypothesis indicated that participants in relationships formed through dating apps have a higher level of couple satisfaction than respondents in traditional relationships.

For the sixth hypothesis, we performed simple linear regression. The criteria for this analysis were satisfied, the correlation coefficient between sensitivity to rejection and dating anxiety was .60 ( $p \leq .01$ ).

The hypothesis is supported by the data: 36% of the variation of the dating anxiety can be explained by the level of sensitivity to rejection, with the model being statistically significant. Rejection sensitivity was found to be a significant predictor of dating anxiety level using regression coefficient analysis. The regression equation is: dating anxiety =  $17.33 + 1.29 \times$  rejection sensitivity (Table 3).

*Prediction of dating anxiety by sensitivity to rejection*

Table 3

Variables		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
		B	Std. Error	$\beta$		
$R^2$	0.36					
F	51.22**					< 0.001
Constant		17.33	8.10		2.14	<0.001
Sensitivity to rejection		1.29	0.18	0.60	7.15	< 0.001

Note: a. Dependent Variable: Dating anxiety

\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ,  $N = 90$ .

## 5. Discussion

The study's objective was to make distinctions between relationships developed through traditional, offline techniques and those formed through internet sites or applications focused on seeking a romantic partner. According to the first hypothesis, individuals in relationships formed through dating apps have a significantly greater level of extraversion, which has also been confirmed by Blackhart and colleagues (2014). Extraversion is the strongest predictor of social networking site usage, according to their research, extroverted people are more likely to utilize online romantic dating apps. Furthermore, in another study by Correa et al. (2009), the idea that extraversion was positively associated with the use of social networks was supported.

The current findings do not support the second hypothesis on self-esteem, as the difference between the means of the two groups is not statistically significant. Two studies, however, have found substantial differences between the two groups. People who used dating apps had greater levels of self-esteem than the other groups investigated, according to Bernad et al. (2020). A second study found that those with low self-esteem use dating sites far more frequently than those with strong self-esteem (Aretz et al., 2010). Faesing's (2020) study, which found no significant change in self-esteem between online dating app users and non-users, is also worth mentioning. The inconsistency in the studies' results can be explained by the fact that participants in the three aforementioned studies and the one in the current study may have responded socially desirable, with the intention of deceiving or self-deceiving, regarding the level of self-esteem (Dings, 2017). Also, their dating history may differ, their age or even the real life or online social networks may represent a factor of diversity.

In the third hypothesis, no statistically significant differences in rejection sensitivity were observed between the two groups. This finding contrasts the findings of Blackhart et al. (2014), who reported that rejection sensitivity was the sole significant predictor of online dating site use. Because rejection sensitivity is associated with increased loneliness, those who are sensitive to rejection may be more prone to use online dating sites to relieve their loneliness. According to the study, persons who are sensitive to rejection are more likely to utilize online dating sites because they believe they can express their actual selves more easily online than offline (Hance et al., 2018).

The fourth hypothesis confirmed that participants who developed relationships via dating apps showed decreased levels of dating anxiety. According to one study, internet dating appears to be a popular occupation, particularly among those with low levels of dating anxiety. These individuals appear to use the Internet to find a companion. Patterns that exist in the real world are increasingly showing up in online life. Extroverts, for example, create more online friends than introverts, and those who have low dating anxiety are more likely to engage in online dating than those who have high dating anxiety (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

Couple satisfaction was also investigated and it was discovered that participants in relationships formed with the use of dating apps have a higher level of couple satisfaction than those in traditional partnerships. Also, according to the findings of a study conducted by Cacioppo et al. (2013), in the case of continuing marriages, those in which the respondents met their spouse online were assessed as more satisfying than marriages that began in an offline meeting via traditional techniques. Furthermore, studies on breakups and divorces found that marriages formed through online dating were less likely to end in divorce or separation than marriages formed through traditional methods. Other studies supporting this idea indicate that online dating has huge potential to improve what is frequently a time-consuming and stressful activity for many people: creating a committed, emotionally gratifying romantic relationship (Finkel et al., 2012).

The current data confirmed the last hypothesis, with rejection sensitivity being a strong predictor of dating anxiety no matter how couple was formed. According to Frank's (2018) research, rejection sensitivity and rejection expectancies have a major impact on relationships. The expectation of rejection by the partner frequently leads to discontent or even separation from the spouse. As a result, if one expects rejection because of their appearance, they are more likely to react negatively to conflict, respond poorly to their partner, and eventually realize their initial expectations. Dating anxiety and rejection sensitivity combine to produce a recipe for failure when it comes to dealing with intimacy.

Concerning the study's limitations, the first refers to the duration of the partnerships of the respondents, which ranged from one month to 60 months, meaning they were in different stages of their relationship. Reese-Weber (2015) differentiate three phases: the honeymoon phase, the defining phase, and the established phase. Intimacy may increase from the defining to the established phases, and conflict may decrease when differences are settled and mutual expectations for partnerships are ascertained. No information on the phase of the relationship was collected but has implication on couple satisfaction. Furthermore, some of the questionnaires used in the study were developed more than 25 years ago (dating anxiety scale, self-esteem scale, rejection sensitivity scale), suggesting that they may no longer correspond to the current characteristics of new generations as socio-cultural changes are obvious. As such we may consider potentially measurement errors due to outdated scales. Another potential constraint is the manner the variables were measured, with the instruments using Likert scales. When asked about attitudes or behaviour, the use of this type of scale on the questionnaire might be a limiting factor; many participants may avoid selecting the extreme values (Theofanidis

& Fountouki, 2018).

Finally, regardless of the assurances of anonymity, the respondents may have answered desirably. That might explain the lack of significant differences regarding self-esteem and rejection sensitivity in the two groups.

In future studies all factors from BIG FIVE model might be addressed, not only extraversion. A more extensive study allows a better description of young population and their tendency to use mostly online or face to face dating at the beginning of a relationship. Giving that sensitivity to rejection is a good predictor of dating anxiety, interventions can be tailored to support people in such situation. Self-esteem level contributes as a favourable reinforcement and is responsive to interventions.

In conclusion, significant differences in extraversion, dating anxiety, and couple satisfaction were discovered for the two research subsamples. There were group variations in rejection sensitivity and self-esteem, but these were statistically inconsistent.

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