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Using Media to Connect in Romantic Relationships: Effects on Attachment, Relationship Satisfaction and Stability



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Introduction

Today's youth are growing up in a world saturated by media in various forms. Most American households are equipped with internet access, email, online chatting, instant messaging and other online services. Not surprisingly, young adults are increasingly reliant on electronic media as a mechanism for connecting with others (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; van den Einjden & Meerkerk, 2008). Given that a major developmental task in emerging adulthood is the formation of healthy social connections and mutually-satisfying, interdependent relationships (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006), it is distressing how little is known about media usage and relationship quality. In an effort to better understand this association in an emerging adult population, this study is designed as an exploration into the link between media use and relationship satisfaction and stability as mediated by the level of attachment in emerging adults' romantic relationships.



Results

- Gaming was not significantly related to the measured relationship variables
- Attachment was positively related to relationship satisfaction for both groups (Males = .46, $p = .000$; Females = .52, $p = .000$)
- Attachment was positively related to relationship stability for both groups (Males = .22, $p = .02$; Females = .25, $p = .017$)
- Using media to connect with their partners was associated with higher relationship attachment for both groups (Males = .21, $p = .05$; Females = .28, $p = .004$)
- For both groups, using media to hurt their partners was negatively associated with both relationship satisfaction and stability:
 - Satisfaction: Males = $-.23$, $p = .02$; Females = $-.17$, $p = .059$
 - Stability: Males = $-.37$, $p = .000$; Females = $-.27$, $p = .02$
- Significant findings for females only:
 - Using media for positive communication was associated with higher attachment ($.26$, $p = .04$)
 - Using media to hurt a partner was negatively associated with attachment ($-.26$, $p = .017$)
 - Using media for serious issues was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction ($-.24$, $p = .03$)

Method

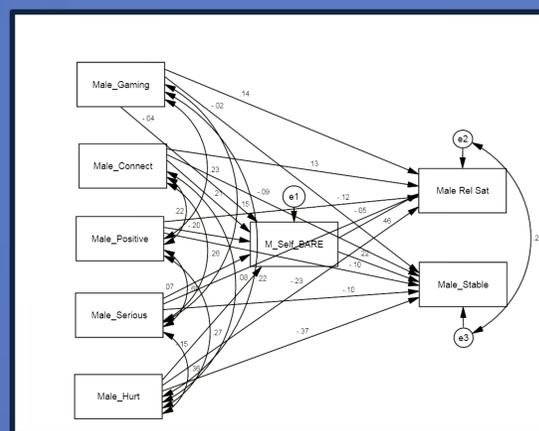
Participants:

- N = 176 males and females (88 couples) between the ages of 18 and 25 identifying themselves as currently being in involved in a romantic relationship
- Male mean age 22.59, SD 1.73 and SD; Female mean age 21.55, SD = 1.92
- Couples self-selected to participate in the Relationship Evaluation (RELATE) questionnaire
- Male ethnicity was Caucasian (86.6%), mixed/biracial (3.4%), Latino (3.1%), Asian (2.7%) and African/Black (2.7%)
- Female ethnicity was Caucasian (86.3%), mixed/biracial (4.1%), Latino (3.8%), Asian (2.8%) and African/Black (1.7%).
- 66% of males reported some college; 71% of females had some college
- Religious affiliations were Latter-day Saint/Mormon (54.3%), Protestant (22.7%), none (8.6%), Catholic (6.9%), and Jewish (1%).

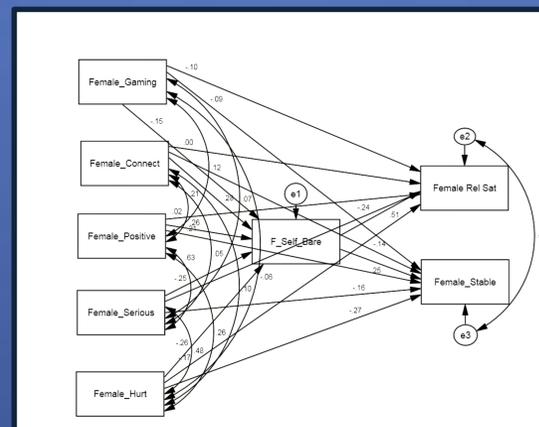
Procedures:

- Couples answered questions related to frequency of use on Likert-type scale for gaming and using media to connect with non-facial and non-vocal means, such as texting, email and social networking
- Couples answered questions on same scale related media use for regulating the relationship with positive intent, negative intent, and serious intent
- Couples answered questions about how available they were to their partners using a new brief attachment scale (BARE), where a higher score means more partner accessibility, responsiveness and engagement
- Couples answered questions related to relationship satisfaction and stability
- Path analysis was performed using AMOS

Male Model



Female Model



Conclusion

Attachment appears to be a strong indicator of relationship satisfaction and stability for both males and females. Using media to connect with one's partner seems to be associated with higher levels of attachment. However, using media to hurt a partner may have deleterious effects on satisfaction and stability. More significant findings appeared for females, which may reflect additional gender differences in communication patterns. Females may reach out more frequently when they feel less attached in a relationship. New forms of media may have the potential to be both beneficial and harmful in relationships. These tools may function to keep partners accessible, responsive and engaged with one another. Gender differences indicate that additional research is necessary to better understand how communication with new technological devices may affect emerging adult romantic relationships.

References

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