Personality, Self-Esteem, Interpersonal Relationships and Friendships

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Abstract
According to Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, all humans, whether young or old, have the same basic needs. For humans, self-esteem and friendships are deemed important to psychological well-being. The present study explores the correlation between levels of extraversion, shyness, self-esteem, and the number of friends an individual reports having. Participants completed items from the Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (1983), the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (1992), and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965), to determine personality trait and self-esteem scores, and the Abbreviated Duke Social Support Index (1993) to determine levels of social support. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between the self-esteem variables and the number of friends a person has. Shyness and extraversion are negatively correlated, as are shyness and friends. In the future, variables such as family relationships, in relation to group member satisfaction, parental rearing, and socioeconomic standings may be assessed and considered as potential predictors of each of the variables measured. The current study has several implications for school teachers, counselors, and child and school psychologists.

Key Terms: Extraversion, Introversion, Friendship, Personality, Self-Esteem

Forming and maintaining healthy peer relationships is an important element of psychological adjustment, well being, and socialization across the human life span (Szewczyk-Sokolowski, Bost, & Wainwright, 2005). Throughout their life span, people spend a considerable amount of time and devotion gaining and maintaining what is known as friendships. Friendship is hard to test empirically because it is an abstract concept. It cannot be perceived by our five senses, thereby making it difficult to define. However, the best way to describe friendship is that it is characterized by intimacy in a relationship, which is founded on the concern of each friend for the other’s well being (Helm, 2005). Most often, friendship involves the tendency to care and share in the lives of other people, in addition to sharing in their joys, pains, and experiences, whether good or bad. These tendencies develop early in the lifespan.

As early as age three or four, children can show preferences for interacting with certain other children, and the term “friend” becomes ingrained in their vocabularies (Hartup & Stevens, 1999). The most basic concept of friendship to a toddler is simply picking a partner with whom to play. A repeated playful interaction between two or more toddlers constitutes a friendship. Children learn to interact with other children and invite them into their personal space. This occurrence precedes interacting and performing within an interpersonal or intergroup relationship. However, not all children at the toddler stage of development warmly welcome all
of their peers into their play groups. Not only do children at that age express inclusion, they also express rejection of another child by cruel measures such as ignoring and insulting an outsider (Leets & Leets, 2004). Children at the toddler stage possess the capabilities to provide verbal and nonverbal cues to reject the belongingness of an undesired individual to their group.

To build a relationship that may lead to a friendship, the child’s personality, or collective behaviors, is considered an important predictive factor in building a relationship that may lead to a friendship. Generally, girls are more sociable than boys (Carson, Wagner, & Schultz, 2001). However, gender alone does not predict or determine success at interpersonal interactions. Temperamental characteristics are also related to social adjustment (Walker, Berthelsen, & Irving, 2001). A child’s temperament will predict his or her success at attempting intergroup interactions regardless of gender (Szewczyk-Sololowski et al., 2005). The inhibited nature of a shy individual will most likely prevent him or her from attempting interpersonal interactions. On the other hand, an outgoing, uninhibited, unreserved, well-behaved child will be more successful at interpersonal relationships. Most likely, he or she has a fundamental understanding of the concepts of sharing and taking turns, which will encourage other children to engage in continued play.

While some children approach new situations confidently, shy children tend to approach new situations hesitantly (Wilson, 2006). If a child shows interest in becoming a member of a social group and group member invitation is not extended, inclusion may be attempted by the child. Positive integration into a social group, characterized by the absence of rejection, scolding, teasing, etc., is needed for regular social interaction with peers (Wilson, 2006). The acceptance or rejection of a child by his or her peers serves as either punishment or reinforcement for future interpersonal relations. Children who are well liked and sought frequently as playmates by their peers, learn the most desirable interpersonal interaction skills from peer reinforcement (Hardy, 1937). If an individual has a lot of friends in childhood, then he or she will likely continue to gain a lot of friends throughout adulthood.

Children’s development of effective communication skills is vital to successful interpersonal interactions (Mendez, McDermott, & Fantuzzo, 2002). In general, extraverted individuals seem to have more friends than introverted individuals. Extraverts are sociable, active, dominant, and assertive. Introverts are quiet, reserved, and somewhat pessimistic. They take everyday life seriously, keep their feelings and tempers under control, and act responsibly (Gudjonsson et al, 2004). Most extraverts are outgoing, and most introverts are shy. However, an individual may possibly be neither extraverted nor introverted. Personality traits are identified on opposite ends of a continuum, and most people tend to score along the median. In other words, most people are neither extremely extraverted, nor extremely introverted, but they tend to exhibit characteristics of both traits, somewhat equally.

Although shy children tend to have fewer friends than extraverted ones, shy individuals may possibly form more intimate relationships that are qualitatively and fundamentally different from those of more extraverted individuals (Fordham & Stevenson-Hide, 1999). Extraverts may have more friends to whom they are obligated to designate time. Introverts or shy individuals may have more opportunities to strengthen and solidify the bond between themselves and their friends.
An adult friendship shared between two extraverts may be founded on the basis of simply having fun together, or living in the moment. A relationship between two introverts, on the other hand, may be based upon communicating the emotions felt between the two individuals. This does not suggest that either relationship is better than the other; it does, however, indicate that they are fundamentally different. The two people involved in the relationship determine the degree of relationship satisfaction.

Friendship quality is also related to family support (Franco & Levitt, 1998), which is an important aspect in almost every area of an individual’s life. The relationship between an individual and members of his or her family may predict psychological and social adjustment as well as peer relations. For example, people whose families are not emotionally supportive tend to be less successful at interpersonal interactions and friendships than people whose families are emotionally supportive.

Self-esteem can also be an additional indicative factor when considering interpersonal interactions and friendship development among children and adults alike. Individuals with higher self-esteem ratings will engage in more interpersonal relationships than individuals with lower self-esteem ratings. Although friendship may provide a context in which children’s social and moral development may be fostered (Dunn & Cutting, 1999), people with low self-esteem often feel rejected and are especially sensitive to cues of rejection (Dehart, Pelham, & Murray, 2004), with or without premise.

An individual with low self-esteem may develop social phobia in childhood which may continue throughout adulthood. Because self-esteem may affect the likelihood of interpersonal interactions, children with low integrative skills may have fewer opportunities for social experiences (Wilson, 2006). Fewer social interactions will lead to fewer friends. Children or adults who feel as if they have no friends tend to become increasingly withdrawn socially, resulting in an increase in aggression, depression, and anxiety (Howe & McWilliam, 2006). The anxiety created by participation in social interactions in inhibited, introverted individuals influences the amount and the degree to which participation reoccurs in the future.

The relationship between interpersonal relationships and friendship potential is positive. For instance, one’s number of friendships decreases as one’s number of social interactions decreases. However, as the number of interpersonal interactions increases, the potential to form friendships also greatly increases.

Based on a review of prior research, I hypothesized that individuals who score higher on both self-esteem and extraversion scales, while scoring low on a scale that measures shyness will report having more friendships than an individual who scores low on both a self-esteem and extraversion scale and high on a scale that measures shyness.
Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 39 college students who ranged in ages and classifications. Respondents attended a private university and were predominantly African American. Participants were recruited from postings in the sociology and psychology departments.¹

Materials

The Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (1981), a 13-item, Likert-type scale, was used to measure shyness. Items included statements such as, "I feel tense when I’m with people I don’t know well," and “It is hard for me to act natural when I am meeting new people.” Responses ranged from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree, where a “1” was entered for strongly disagree and a “5” for strongly agree. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, SES (1965) a 10-item, Likert-type scale, was used to measure self-esteem. Items were answered on a four-point scale and included statements such as “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” and “At times I think I am no good at all.” Responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strong disagree. The Abbreviated Duke Social Support Index (1993) was used to measure the amount of social support and friends the participants perceived they had. Participant responses to items were open-ended and numerical. Items included questions such as “How satisfied are you with the kinds of relationships you have with your family and friends? The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised, EPQ-R, (1992), was used to measure extraversion. Items included statements such as “I tend to be nervous.” Response choices included yes, no, and maybe.

Procedure

Participants met in an academic classroom. They completed an informed consent form. The informed consent form ensured the participants that their involvement in the study was voluntary and they were free to leave the study at any time. The experimenter informed participants that the projected duration of the study was 20 minutes. Participants completed the assigned surveys and returned them to the researcher. After the participants submitted their completed surveys, the researcher distributed the debriefing statement. The debriefing statement provided the title of the study and the research hypothesis.

Results

A Pearson correlational analysis measured the relationships among self-esteem, extraversion, shyness, and the reported number of friendship between participants. As Table 1 indicates, the analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the variables self-esteem and friends. This correlation means that as self-esteem increases, so does the number of friends people report having. The variables extraversion and shyness were negatively correlated; as extraversion increases, shyness decreases, and vice versa. Shyness and friends shared a negative correlation; as shyness increases, the number of friends people report having decreases, and vice versa. There did not seem to be a significant relationship between self-esteem and extraversion. Nor did the variables self-esteem and shyness have a significant relationship. The variables extraversion and friends had no apparent relationship.

¹The complete demographic information was not collected from respondents, an omission that will be addressed in the “limitations” section of the essay.
Discussion

The study’s purpose was to explore the correlations between levels of extraversion, shyness, self esteem, and the number of friends an individual reports. The participants completed items from the Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (1983), the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (1992), the Abbreviated Duke Social Support Index (1993), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) to determine personality traits and social support. This study hypothesized that individuals who score higher on a self-esteem and extraversion scale, while scoring low on a scale that measures shyness, will report having more friendships than an individual who scores low on a self-esteem and extraversion scale and high on a scale that measures shyness.

The research findings of this study were consistent with past research, which suggests that shy individuals would be reluctant to interact with strangers and, in some cases, familiar adults, thereby decreasing the likelihood of interpersonal interactions. Despite the fact that interpersonal interactions lead to friendships, some people who are shy or introverted often avoid these types of interactions. Extraverted individuals, on the other hand, tend to more actively engage in interpersonal interactions, resulting in a greater likelihood to make friends. Contrary to the researcher’s assumptions, this study’s data revealed that there was no significant relationship between self-esteem, extraversion level, and shyness. The researcher assumed that shy individuals would not feel very good about themselves. However, the data showed no significant relationship between these variables. In other words, whether or not an individual has high or low self-esteem does not serve as an indicative factor as to the potential for an increased or decreased number of friends or popularity. This finding may indicate that extraverted individuals may feel compelled to be engaged in more compliant behavior to be a part of the “in-crowd,” or to be considered “cool” or “down.”

One limitation to the study was that the researcher omitted demographic questions from the survey which may have reduced its internal validity. Demographic information may have highlighted certain trends specific to or common between certain groups. For example, there may have been a significant relationship between the variables tested. In fact, prior research suggests that gender and sociability are positively correlated; females tend to be more sociable than males. In addition, race may be another important consideration to be addressed. Although the overwhelming majority of the respondents were African American, there may have been people who identified with other races who participated in the survey. As a result, the sample has the potential to be biased, which in turn may reduce the external validity of the study.

The study was also limited because more concise scales for the variables being measured were identified after the study began, such as the “sociability” measure of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised. The “sociability” aspect of the test measures traits that are more commonly associated with the character trait extremes of introversion and extraversion. Other factors that were not considered, such as parental involvement and child rearing practices may also limit this study.

The study has several implications for school teachers, counselors, and child and school psychologists. The research findings suggest that temperamental characteristics in some ways affect an individual’s social adjustment. On average, individuals have the lowest self-esteem
scores in childhood and adolescence, which in turn, affects the number of friends an individual will have. This study reinforces the importance of building up an individual’s self-esteem for greater psychological health. Greater psychological health may help produce greater social interactions, social and psychological adjustments, and overall satisfaction and well-being.

In the future, this study should compare an elementary-aged sample of children with an adult, college-aged sample. In addition, this study could be conducted as a longitudinal study. Longitudinal studies tend to be costly, and mortality rates tend to be high, but the benefits of the findings may outweigh the costs. Perhaps the responses to the questionnaires will change over time. Maybe as people mature, their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors will vary.

The researcher initially assumed that extraversion would be a more indicative friendship factor than what seems to be shown by the data. It was also assumed that extraversion would have a higher correlation with self-esteem. However, the gathered data did not support any of these assumptions. The findings of this study may be a useful contribution to the fields of Developmental and School Psychology. Since self-esteem and shyness had strong correlations with number of friends, it may be useful to investigate these variables further to improve the effectiveness of therapy for those who seek to improve their social interactions.
References


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Table 1
Correlation Coefficients among Self-Esteem Scores, Number of Friends, Shyness Scores, and Extraversion Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Number of Friends</th>
<th>Shyness</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Friends</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shyness</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note. N=39. *p < .05.