

Influence of Personality Traits and Causal Attribution to the Relationship Structure of Senior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Research on the factors influencing relationship dynamics among adolescents has been sparse. To address the knowledge gap identified, this study aims to significantly predict the relationship structure of senior high school students in considering their personality traits and causal attributions. Quantitative research was conducted to describe the personality traits, causal attributions, and relationship structure of senior high school students using descriptive statistics. The data gathered from self-reported test questionnaires of the Big Five Personality Test of McCrae & Costa (1996), Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDS-II) of Bernard Weiner (2010), and the Experiences Close Relationships—Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) Questionnaire of Fraley et al. (2011) were effectively analyzed using Pearson’s R correlation coefficient to explore the relationship between personality traits, causal attributions, and relationship structure among the respondents. Descriptive statistics revealed that agreeableness and openness were the most notable personality traits among respondents. The locus of causality appeared to be the respondents' causal attribution. While, solely the father-parental relationship structure showed higher compared to the mother-parental relationship and friends relationship structure. This study highlights the significance of factors that may influence association patterns among adolescents. Assessing their association patterns as either healthy or toxic will serve as a crucial first step in their journey towards understanding and navigating their deep identity transformation.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Causal Attribution, Relationship Structure, Senior High School

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is marked by a significant shift in relationship structures. As adolescents prepare to become more independent from their parents, their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development interplays to shape the expression and significance of their relationships. Although the specifics of adolescent relationship structures are not fully understood, developmental psychologists view the adolescent attachment system as expanding and evolving into various forms. In recent decades, researchers in personality and social psychology have made significant psychometric advances by using multi-item scales grounded in a two-dimensional model of attachment for adult romantic relationships (Fraley et al., 2015). The latest development in this line of research is the Experiences in Close Relationships-

Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) scale (Fraley et al., 2011). This tool is designed to evaluate attachment structures across various relationships using a consistent set of items (Hayashida et al., 2021; Dove, 2020; Karatas & Demir, 2018; Zhou et al., 2017).

The Experiences in Close Relationships–Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) scale was initially created to evaluate variations in attachment across different relational contexts (such as with parents and friends) among adults. However, some studies have shown strong validation for using the ECR-RS to assess attachment structures in children and adolescents as well (Sarling et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Karatas & Demir, 2018; Donbaek & Elkliit, 2014). Despite this, there is limited knowledge about the psychometric properties of relationship structures in Southeast Asian cultures and youth populations (Zhang et al., 2021; Karataş & Demir, 2019; Donbaek & Elkliit, 2014). Additionally, there is no existing literature that explores the impact of causal attributions on relationship structures (Dove, 2020). Donbaek & Elkliit (2014) and Fraley et al. (2011) suggest that selecting one or more relationship domains should be based on the specific goals of the research. In this study, the independent variables are the senior high school students' personality traits and causal attributions, and the dependent variable is the respondents' relationship structure. This quantitative study examines which variables, including personality traits and causal attribution, can significantly predict the relationship structure among senior high school students. This study used descriptive statistics to offer a clear summary of the extent of personality traits, causal attribution, and relationship structure of the respondents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspective on Students' Personality Traits

According to Sayehmire et al., (2020), personality traits can predict an individual's behavior in various situations, including interpersonal relationships. Understanding the impact of personality on relationship quality can enhance our comprehension of close relationships (Zhou et al., 2017). Furthermore, personality plays a crucial role in forecasting future behaviors and actions in close relationships (Park & MacDonald, 2019).

Moreover, Diehl (2020) and Lanning (2017) suggest that distinguishing between 'personality' and 'social relationship' is just one way of examining their interconnected nature. This perspective has led to significant insights into how personality affects social relationships and vice versa (Geukes et al., 2019). Accordingly, personality is viewed as characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that shape interactions with the environment (Czerniawska & Szydło, 2021).

Therefore, McCrae & Costa (1999) one of the most widely utilize theoretical model in the field personality research, categorized individual differences in human emotions and experiences into five fundamental traits to further related how social associations can be studied. Accordingly, the following are the sub-dimensions of the said theoretical model of McCrae & Costa (1999): Openness to Experience (inventive/curious versus consistent/cautious), Conscientiousness (efficient/organized versus easy-going/careless), Extraversion (outgoing/energetic versus solitary/reserved), Agreeableness (friendly/compassionate versus challenging/detached), and Neuroticism (sensitive/nervous versus secure/confident).

Theoretical Perspective on Students Causal Attribution

Relational attributions are a relatively new concept in the study of causality. They refer to explanations made by an individual that place the cause of an event within the context of their relationship with another person (Carson et al., 2024). This perspective offers an alternative to the conventional view in interpersonal relationship behavior research, which typically holds that an individual's reaction to a negative relational event is directed towards a specific person seen as responsible for the event. For instance, if someone attributes significant individual to relational factors, they might believe that aspects of the relationship, such as its quality, communication dynamics, or personality differences, contributed to the issue (Eberly et al., 2017). Practically speaking, relational attributions imply that responsibility for an outcome is shared between the parties involved, rather than being solely assigned to either the offender or the target.

In connection, Bernard Weiner's attribution theory posits that the effect of any causal attribution on future adjustment and behavior can be predicted by four key characteristics: locus of causality, stability, personal control, and external control (Weiner, 2010). Locus of causality refers to whether the perceived cause is internal or external to the individual, with internal attributions typically involving personal ability or effort, while external attributions involve environmental factors or others (Wang & Hall, 2018). The stability dimension reflects one's belief about whether the cause is likely to remain consistent or change over time (Ardura, Zamora, & Pérez-Bitrián, 2021; Ferraz et al., 2019). External control refers to the perception that external forces govern the outcomes or events in one's life. Various studies have used different measurement scales to evaluate relationship satisfaction, and this theory also suggests that family experiences may directly influence relationship attributes (Dove, 2020).

Theoretical Perspective on Students Relationship Structure

The relationship structure of Fraley, et al, 2011 also the author of the Experiences in Close Relationships—Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) questionnaire is heavily influenced by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's attachment theory, which originated from the study of infant attachment to primary caregivers (Flaherty & Sadler, 2011). Moreover, several studies have shown that the ECR-RS is also robustly validated for evaluating relationship-specific attachment structures in adolescents (Sarling et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Karatas & Demir, 2018; Donbaek & Elklit, 2014).

In response, according to such theory, internal working models are one of the determinants of the quality of intimate relationships throughout the life cycle (Zhang et al., 2021). Besides, attachment is affected by developmental differences in individuals' life courses, and attachment behaviors may display an alteration in terms of these developmental differences (Flaherty & Sadler, 2011). Adolescence is a period characterized by several developmental changes that emphasize the redefinition of self, autonomy, and intimacy, which altogether influence the quality of attachment (Sarling et al., 2021).

Having that discussed, relationship structure is understood to involve strong emotional connections between the self and others (Karatas & Demir, 2018). Fraley et al. (2011) demonstrated that (a) the ECR-RS measures of attachment styles are linked to fundamental aspects of relationship functioning (such as satisfaction, commitment, and investment) and (b) considering the context helps to better understand certain relationship outcomes. Donbaek &

Elkli (2014) and Fraley et al. (2011) recommend selecting one or more relationship domains based on the specific research objectives.

This study posits that the pattern of familial association like father and mother-parental relationship structure and other close relationship like friends-relationship structure can contribute to the individual's identity, future outlook, and other important aspects of a person's life. Therefore, as discussed above, early negative associations can impact future social connections, potentially leading to confusion and dissatisfaction in relationships with others.

METHODS

Research Design

This quantitative study employed a descriptive research design to systematically gather information about the variables in the study. Moreover, it focuses on identifying what variables can significantly predict the relationship structure of the respondents.

Population and Sampling Technique

The respondents for this study were senior high school students from two private schools in Polillo, Quezon, specifically from the following Senior High School Strands, namely, Accountancy, Business and Management (ABM), General Academic Strand (GAS), Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW), and Electrical Installation and Maintenance (EIM). A total of 150 survey questionnaires were distributed, and all were returned, but only 138 were deemed valid for encoding.

Purposive sampling was employed in this study because it aligns with the characteristics of the target population. This sampling method involves selecting participants based on the researcher's judgment and pre-established criteria. In this case, respondents were chosen based on their grade level and the specific academic strands of ABM, GAS, SMAW, and EIM. The study focused on these two private schools in Polillo, Quezon, as they are the only private schools on the island.

The survey questionnaires were distributed to respondents in their classrooms. The study specifically targeted senior high school students whose parents (both father and mother) are still together, as well as those whose parents are separated but maintain contact with one biological parent. Students whose father or mother has been deceased or out of contact for more than five years were excluded from the data collection.

Instrumentation

Big Five Personality Test

The Big Five Personality Test of McCrae & Costa (1996) consists of 44 self-report questions designed to assess five dimensions of personality: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, which are commonly used to describe human personality and psyche. The results are obtained by summing the scores from all the items according to their classifications. Some items in this test are reverse scored, meaning that the responses to these items are counted in the opposite direction of how they were answered.

Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDSII)

The CDSII of Bernard Weiner (2010), utilizes a 5-point Likert scale to assess how individuals perceive the causes of events. Respondents use the CDSII to rate causal attributions across several semantic differential scales that reflect dimensions of locus of causality, stability, and control (both external and internal). Scores for each dimension are calculated by summing the responses to relevant items: items 1, 2, and 3 for locus of causality; items 4, 5, and 6 for external control; items 7, 8, and 9 for stability; and items 10, 11, and 12 for personal control.

The CDSII has been adapted into a five-point Likert scale format (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree), with each item presented as a statement for clearer understanding by senior high school students. The highest score reflects the respondent's personal attribution, indicating their belief about the causes (locus of causality, external control, stability, and personal control) behind their perceptions of why certain events occur. This, in turn, influences their subsequent emotions, decision-making, and performance.

Experiences in Close Relationships–Relationship Structures (ECR-RS)

The ECR-RS questionnaire of Fraley et al. (2011) is a self-report tool designed to evaluate attachment patterns across various close relationships. It uses a 4-point Likert scale for responses (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree). The initial five items for each type of close relationship were adapted to differentiate between specific parental relationships (father and mother) and peer relationships (friends). After reversing the scores for the first five items of each relationship category, the total scores are computed for each relationship type (father, mother, friends). Items 1-5 in all categories are scored in reverse.

Data Gathering Procedures

The survey questionnaires were distributed to respondents within their classrooms. Participants were selected based on their grade level as senior high school students from the STEM, ABM, GAS, SMAW, and EIM strands. Only two private schools in Polillo, Quezon were chosen for data collection, as these are the only private schools on the island.

The study targeted senior high school students whose parents (both father and mother) are still together, as well as those whose parents are separated but who still have contact with one biological parent. Students whose parents are deceased or have been out of contact for more than five years were excluded from the study.

Approval for data collection was obtained from the principals of the two private schools to ensure ethical considerations. Participants' anonymity was maintained, and their data confidentiality was strictly upheld. Respondents were not required to provide any personal information that could identify them on the questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, and students could withdraw from the study at any time. Questionnaires that were incomplete or not fully answered were excluded from the data analysis.

Analysis of Data

The collected data was initially coded in Excel and then imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v. 26) for analysis. Outliers were identified and removed before analyzing the remaining data to produce the required results for interpretation. This study

seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) what is the extent of personality traits of the respondents in terms of its dimensions. (2) What is the extent of causal attribution of the respondents in terms of its dimensions. (3) What is the extent of relationship structure of the respondents in terms of its dimensions. (4) Which variables, including personality traits and causal attribution, can significantly predict the relationship structure of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were used to address research questions 1 to 3, while regression analysis was employed for research question 4.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Summary of Descriptive Analysis

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Personality Traits			
Extraversion	3.22	.47081	Moderate
Agreeableness	3.50	.45053	High
Consciousness	3.34	.49338	Moderate
Neuroticism	2.78	.42806	Moderate
Openness to experience	3.64	.51034	High
Causal Attribution			
Locus of Causality	4.06	.87584	High
Locus of Stability	3.70	.74686	High
Locus of Personal Control	3.70	.73680	High
Locus of External Control	3.70	.74686	High
Relationship Structure			
Father-Parental Relationship Structure	2.53	.40417	Moderate
Mother-Parental Relationship Structure	2.40	.35328	Low
Friends-Relationship Structure	2.37	.34004	Low

Scoring System: Personality Traits: 1.00-1.39=Low 2.49-3.49=Moderate 3.50-4.50=High

Causal attribution: 1.00-1.39=Low 2.49-3.49=Moderate 3.50-4.50=High

Relationship Structure: 1.39-2.49=Low 2.50-3.50=Moderate 3.51-4.51=High

Table 1 provides a response to research question number 1, which investigates the extent of personality traits in relation to its dimensions. According to the data in table 1, the agreeableness (3.5024) and openness (3.5024) scores are relatively high. Therefore, agreeableness and openness are the prominent personality traits of the respondents as table 1 reveals. In relation, agreeableness is defined by traits such as helpfulness, courtesy, success in interpersonal relationships, and a willingness to cooperate (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Rohinsa, Cahyadi, Djunaidi, and Iskandar (2019) found that students who score high on agreeableness tend to be compliant, actively engage in school activities, and maintain strong social networks. On the other hand, openness to experience is marked by creativity, curiosity, a broad range of interests, a readiness to embrace challenges, and intellectual engagement. Individuals with high openness are often resistant to rigid rules, question norms, and possess a critical, non-conservative mindset (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This openness can sometimes create difficulties when dealing with school demands and issues.

With regards to research question number 2, which investigates the extent of causal attribution among the respondents in terms of its dimensions, Table 1 displays that score for locus of causality (4.0580), stability (4.0604), personal control (3.7029), and external control (3.6981) are all high. Therefore, the respondents generally believe each dimension influences the causes of their behavior. In connection to the results, these suggest that senior high school students are frequently guided by their behaviors and tend to assess the outcomes of events based on their own actions (Wang & Hall, 2018).

In relation to research question number 3, which examines the extent of relationship structure among the respondents in terms of its dimensions, the findings from table 1 indicate that the overall relationship with fathers-parental relationship is moderate (2.5283), whereas the mother-parental relationship (2.3971) and friends-relationship structure (2.3746) are low. Having the results provided, Fraley et al. (2011) indicate that relationship structures are linked to fundamental aspects of relationship functioning such as satisfaction, commitment, and investment, and that considering context helps in understanding relationship outcomes. Given that the scores for these sub-variables are low, it supports Karatas & Demir's (2018) assertion that low relationship structures are indicative of weak emotional connections between individuals. However, the moderate score for father-relationships might suggest a different dynamic in this context.

Table 2
Significant Relationship in terms Causal Attribution and Relationship Structure with Friends

	Unstandardized coefficient	t-value	Sig	R ²	F-value	Sig
Constant	2.698	19. 945	.000	.042	5.986	.016
Locus of Causality	-.080	- 2. 442	.016			

Sig=Significant

R²=coefficient of determination

Table 2 answers research question number 4 that investigates which variables, including personality traits and causal attribution, can significantly predict the relationship structure of the respondents. It reveals that causal attribution shows a significant correlation ($t=-2.442$, $sig=.016$) specifically with the locus of causality dimension. This indicates that respondents view locus of causality as a key behavioral factor influencing their relationship structure with friends. Consequently, the hypothesis that no variables significantly predict the relationship structure of senior high school students is therefore rejected. On the other hand, it is important to highlight that the value of personality traits did not satisfy the criteria in the regression model analysis concerning research question number 4.

Having discussed the results, these suggest that respondents' perceptions of their relationship structure are driven by behavioral factors. This is consistent with Turban, Brown, Tan, and Sheldon (2007), as cited in Hayashida et al., (2021), which found that when individuals base their relationship structure on behavioral motivations, it can predict their satisfaction and enjoyment, thereby increasing their commitment to these relationships.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

This research paper examined personality traits and causal attribution to evaluate the relationship structure of senior high school students. Based on the of the present study, descriptive statistics revealed that agreeableness and openness were the most notable personality traits among respondents. The locus of causality appeared to be the respondents' causal attribution. While solely the father-parental relationship structure showed higher compared to the mother-parental relationship and friends-relationship structure.

In conclusion, from a theoretical perspective, the study did not validate its hypothesis, as personality traits did not predict relationship structure. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that personality traits influence relationship structure. Consequently, using personality traits to measure relationship structure among senior high school students may not be the most effective approach for the outcomes of interest.

Therefore, the study acknowledges some limitations. First, the measurement tools used, such as the personality traits items, may not effectively capture the dependent variable. The personality traits questionnaire lacks items specifically designed to assess relationship structure, focusing instead on general behavioral tendencies rather than the particular dynamics of relationships. A second limitation is that many senior high school students who participated were unfamiliar with self-report questionnaires, which could lead to response acquiescence.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Expand Research Scope:** Conduct further research with a larger sample size using a descriptive study design to obtain more comprehensive results.
2. **Include Academic Strands:** When working with the same respondents, consider including academic strands as a moderating variable to ensure a more balanced representation across different strands.
3. **Pilot Testing:** Any survey questionnaires used, particularly those adapted for similar variables, should undergo a pilot study to ensure they produce meaningful results.
4. **Orientation for Respondents:** Provide thorough and clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaires, considering the nature of the instruments, before distribution.
5. **Incorporate Additional Factors:** Future researchers using the same variables should consider including additional factors to better understand their impact on relationship structure among the respondents.

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