



Gender Differences in Correlates of Relationship Satisfaction During the Transition to Parenthood



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Introduction

- Many couples experience reduced relationship satisfaction when they become parents for the first time.
- Previous research suggests that stable individual characteristics, such as personality traits, may be greater risk factors for depression and anxiety for women during this period.
- Situational factors, such as partner's distress, may be greater risk factors for depression and anxiety for men during this period.
- Previous research suggests that depression is a predictor of relationship satisfaction for both men and women.
- There is conflicting evidence as to whether depression is a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction for men or for women.
- The goal of this study was to investigate whether there are gender differences in personality traits as predictors of relationship satisfaction during this period and contribute to the existing research on depression as a predictor of relationship satisfaction.

Method

- Data were obtained from previous studies of first-time mothers (Sockol, Epperson, & Barber, 2014) and fathers (Sockol & Allred, 2017).
- Participants were either expectant first-time parents (participant or partner currently pregnant with a first child) or new first-time parents (with a child 6 months old or younger). All participants were between the ages of 18-45 and resided in the United States.
- The current analyses were restricted to participants who reported being in a relationship at the time of assessment.
 - Mothers ($n = 215$):
 - 40.9% expectant mothers; 59.1% new mothers
 - Mean age 29.4 years
 - Fathers ($n = 224$):
 - 50.4% expectant fathers; 49.6% new fathers
 - Mean age 31.5 years
 - 87.7% White Non-Hispanic
- Participants completed a series of self-report measures assessing:
 - Personality Traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness & Neuroticism)
 - Big Five Inventory
 - Depressive Symptoms
 - Mothers: Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale
 - Fathers: Beck Depression Inventory
 - Anxiety
 - Mothers: State-Trait Anxiety Inventory
 - Fathers: Beck Anxiety Inventory
 - Relationship Satisfaction
 - Dyadic Adjustment Scale
- We conducted a series of regressions to assess the contributions of personality traits and psychological symptoms to relationship satisfaction.
 - The first set of models assessed each predictor in a separate model. Each model included gender, whether the individual was in the antenatal or postnatal sample, the predictor, and the interaction between gender and the predictor.
 - The next set of models assessed contributions of each set of predictors (personality factors & symptoms) and interactions between each included predictor and gender.
 - The full model included gender, antenatal or postnatal group, all predictors, and all interaction terms.

Results

Multiple Regressions Assessing Individual Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction

Predictor	Adjusted R^2	Gender β	Sample β	Predictor β	Gender x Predictor Interaction β
Openness	.04**	.05	-.01	.19*	.00
Conscientiousness	.06***	-.01	-.03	.35***	-.17*
Extraversion	.03**	.02	-.01	.13	.07
Agreeableness	.08***	-.00	-.00	.29***	.01
Neuroticism	.11***	.08	-.03	-.30***	-.05
Depression	.16***	.04	-.01	-.46***	.08
Anxiety	.16***	.04	-.05	-.39***	-.02

Hierarchical Multiple Regressions Assessing Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction

Predictor	Model 1: Personality Traits		Model 2: Psychological Symptoms		Model 3: All Predictors	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Step 1		.00		.00		.00
Gender	.04		.04		.05	
Sample (Antenatal or Postnatal)	-.02		-.03		-.03	
Step 2		.16***		.19***		.24***
Openness	.12*		—		.12**	
Conscientiousness	.11*		—		.06	
Extraversion	.04		—		.04	
Agreeableness	.15**		—		.15**	
Neuroticism	-.21***		—		-.03	
Depression	—		-.24***		-.24***	
Anxiety	—		-.22***		-.13*	
Step 3		.04**		.01		.03*
Openness and Gender	-.00		—		-.04	
Conscientiousness and Gender	-.29***		—		-.23***	
Extraversion and Gender	.11		—		.08	
Agreeableness and Gender	-.02		—		-.01	
Neuroticism and Gender	-.12		—		-.09	
Depression and Gender	—		.22*		.19*	
Anxiety and Gender	—		-.16		-.09	

Discussion

- Openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness were associated with increased relationship satisfaction; neuroticism and symptoms of anxiety and depression were associated with decreased relationship satisfaction.
- The only predictors to show gender differences were depression and conscientiousness.
- Conscientiousness was associated with higher relationship satisfaction for men, but not women.
- There was a stronger relationship between depression and relationship satisfaction for women.
- Screening procedures may be implemented using these findings to identify couples at risk for low relationship satisfaction during the transition to parenthood.