



## Short Communication

## Establishing the distinctiveness of relationship variables using the Big Five and self-esteem



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## ABSTRACT

Relationship research has identified several key variables that predict the types of relationships individuals seek, the ways they engage partners, and how they see themselves. However, to date, little research has examined a novel variable, emophilia. Emophilia is defined as individual variation that exists with respect to how fast and frequently and individual falls in love. It is critical to establish emophilia as a unique construct in the field of relationship research. The present study explored the associations between various relationship variables and individual difference measures such as the Big Five and self-esteem. The results indicated that each variable had a different pattern of correlations with the Big Five and self-esteem, and that none of the relationship variables were redundant with each other. In particular, emophilia was distinct from both anxious attachment and sociosexuality indicating that it may predict unique variance in relationship research.

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Individuals pursue a variety of relationships. Some relationships are short-term and sexual in nature, whereas others are long-term (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Further, some individuals pursue a mix of long- and short-term relationships (Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007). Further, there are different reasons why some initiate relationships, including (but not limited to): sex (Browning, Hatfield, Kessler, & Levine, 2000), personal growth or security (e.g., Winterheld & Simpson, 2011) or the fulfillment of romantic fantasies (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). However, few have discussed how the repeated rush of falling in love motivates relationship initiation. Further, no research has compared these individual differences in relationship approach to standard measures of everyday personality.

Previous research examining individual differences in relationship quality has focused on attachment styles (Nofle & Shaver, 2006). Individuals who are securely attached tend to engage in healthy and constructive communication and conflict resolution (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), whereas those with insecure attachment styles tend to engage in conflict resolution strategies that undermine their relationship goals (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009). These findings suggest that individuals with insecure attachment styles have personality traits (e.g., low agreeableness, low conscientiousness, high neuroticism) that are not conducive to long-term pair-bonding (Figueredo, Sefcek, & Jones, 2006).

Individuals high in unrestricted sociosexuality also have personality traits (e.g., low agreeableness) that are not conducive to long-term pair-bonding (Schmitt, 2004). Further, such individuals report low levels of

relationship commitment (Mattingly et al., 2011) and change relationship status often (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). In spite of the progress made on identifying variations in approaching relationships, one key individual difference has been neglected: Speed and frequency with which one falls in love (Jones, 2011, 2015; Jones & Paulhus, 2012). Frequency and speed with which one falls in love has been referred to as “emophilia” or EP.<sup>1</sup> The basic premise of emophilia research is that individuals differ in the threshold that must be met in order to feel that they are “in love.” This argument is similar to that of sociosexuality (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990). Whereas restricted individuals have a high threshold that must be met in order to feel comfortable having sex with someone, unrestricted individuals have lower thresholds (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). This threshold is ostensibly met through partner quality, perceived commitment, compatibility, time and familiarity, and the like. For those with a low threshold (i.e., unrestricted sociosexuality), not as many criteria need to be met, and not to the same degree. Thus, such individuals are quite ready to engage in sexual behavior sooner and with a wider variety of individuals (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). An analogous process operates for romantic feelings and love (Jones, 2015). For some, a low threshold is needed in order to come to the conclusion that one is in love.

Although some may argue that emophilia is merely a manifestation of anxious attachment, the moderate correlation with anxious attachment suggests otherwise (Jones, 2011, 2015). Further, the fundamental

<sup>1</sup> For clarity, this construct was originally called, “emotional promiscuity” but across various manuscripts, numerous anonymous reviewers have suggested that this title felt pejorative.

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process of anxious attachment is one based on perceived needs and anxiety (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). In this way, anxious attachment should have a high correlation with neuroticism, whereas emophilia should not. Further, anxious attachment would not explain individuals who fall in love out of the rush of excitement they experience or the fun associated with a novel partner (Tracy, Shaver, Albino, & Cooper, 2003), although they do tend to jump into relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

In addition to anxious attachment and sociosexuality, there is variation in one's endorsement of romanticism or romantic beliefs (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). Being overly romantic in one's beliefs would not be the same as feeling a romantic connection right away or falling in love quickly. One difference would be that romanticism is associated with perceiving love as forever, whereas emophilia is associated with repeated experiences of love (Jones, 2011). Nevertheless, romanticism is critical to explore alongside emophilia to ensure that the two constructs are not redundant.

## 1. Present research

The purpose of the present research is: (a) to establish that emophilia is unique among a variety of relationship dispositions, (b) to demonstrate that it is not redundant with everyday personality or self-esteem measures. For example, if emophilia has a large correlation with anxious attachment, and a similar pattern of correlations with the Big Five, emophilia is not worth studying. If not, however, then emophilia may further contribute to the conversation of individual differences in approaching relationships. Thus, the present exploratory study examined correlations between variables such as self-esteem and the Big Five of personality and a variety of relationship variables.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 261 adults recruited from Mechanical Turk (64% women; Mean age = 27.61; 68% European Heritage, 11% East Asian, 7% Latino(a); 7% African Heritage; 7% other mixed ethnicities), which is a reliable source of diverse data (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). However, we included two attention checks (e.g., "I breathe oxygen every day," and "I can breathe ocean water."), 24 participants responded inappropriately to these questions, and were therefore removed, leaving a final sample of 237.

### 2.2. Measures

All measures in the current study had acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha \geq 0.73$ ), and all were scored on a 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5(Strongly Agree) Likert-type scale, with two exceptions. The first was Long-term Mating Orientation, which was scored on a 1(Strongly Disagree) to 7(Strongly Agree) Likert-type scale, and sociosexuality which was a mix of response styles.

**Table 1**  
Relationship predictors: Descriptives, internal consistency, and inter-correlations.

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Emophilia	2.92(0.65)	$\alpha = 0.81$					
2. Sociosexuality	–	0.44*	$\alpha = 0.83$				
3. LT Mating	5.89(1.08)	–0.11	–0.35*	$\alpha = 0.87$			
4. Romanticism	3.30(0.52)	0.02	–0.11	0.23*	$\alpha = 0.80$		
5. Anxious Att.	3.81(1.10)	0.32*	0.03	0.01	0.13	$\alpha = 0.91$	
6. Avoidant Att.	3.00(1.05)	0.02	0.27*	–0.57*	–0.18*	0.13*	$\alpha = 0.93$

**Note:** Mean and SD for sociosexuality is not reported because it is standardized prior to creating a composite. Note that LT Mating is on a 1–7 Likert-Type scale, all others are on a 1–5 scale.  
\*  $p < 0.05$ .

### 2.3. Emophilia

To measure emophilia, the 10-item EP-Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2012; see also Jones, 2011) was used. The EP-Scale includes face-valid questions such as, "I fall in love easily." The EP-Scale details can be found in Jones (2011) or online at <http://www.d3cclab.com/assessment-and-research-tools.html>.

### 2.4. Anxious and avoidant attachment

In order to assess attachment styles, the 36-item *Experiences in Close Relationships* scale (ECR) was used (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The ECR breaks into two 18-item subscales of anxious (e.g., "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.") and avoidant (e.g., "I am nervous when partners get too close to me.") attachment.

### 2.5. Sociosexuality

We used the 7-item Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Sample items include "Sex without love is OK," with items tapping sexual behaviors as well as attitudes. The scoring procedure used in all studies was to cap free response items at 11+ and standardize all items. Items were then averaged into a composite score.

### 2.6. Long-term relationship orientation

We assessed a subset of items from the Long-Term Relationship Orientation by using the LTMO subscale of the Multi-dimensional Sociosexuality Inventory (MSOI; Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007). The LTMO uses questions such as "I would like to have a romantic relationship that lasts forever."

### 2.7. Romantic beliefs

We assessed romantic beliefs using the *Romantic Beliefs Scale* (RBS; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The RBS is a 15-item inventory that assesses Westernized notions of romantic love with items such as, "I believe to be truly in love is to be in love forever."

### 2.8. Big five

In order to measure the Big Five in a fairly brief, but reliable, fashion, the 44-item Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) was used. The BFI reliably assesses Extraversion (Mean = 3.13, SD = 0.62,  $\alpha = 0.80$ ), Agreeableness (Mean = 3.61, SD = 0.51,  $\alpha = 0.73$ ), Conscientiousness (Mean = 3.62, SD = 0.54,  $\alpha = 0.77$ ), Neuroticism (Mean = 2.88, SD = 0.65,  $\alpha = 0.81$ ), and Openness to Experience (Mean = 3.64, SD = 0.53,  $\alpha = 0.78$ ).

### 2.9. Self-esteem

In addition to the BFI, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem (RSE) scale was used to measure global self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). The RSE had a typical

**Table 2**  
Correlations between relationship variables and the big five and self-esteem.

	Self-esteem	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
Emophilia	−0.13 <sub>a</sub> (−0.08)	0.09 <sub>a</sub> (0.03)	−0.10 <sub>a</sub> (0.00)	−0.12 <sub>ac</sub> (−0.05)	0.13 <sub>a</sub> (0.07)	0.02 <sub>a</sub> (−0.06)
Sociosexuality	−0.03 <sub>a</sub> (0.18 <sup>*</sup> )	0.05 <sub>a</sub> (0.10)	−0.24 <sub>b</sub> <sup>*</sup> (−0.13)	−0.09 <sub>ac</sub> (0.01)	0.00 <sub>b</sub> (−0.08)	0.15 <sub>b</sub> <sup>*</sup> (0.23 <sup>*</sup> )
LT Mating	0.37 <sub>b</sub> <sup>*</sup> (0.28 <sup>*</sup> )	0.06 <sub>a</sub> (−0.10)	0.30 <sub>c</sub> <sup>*</sup> (0.10)	0.18 <sub>b</sub> <sup>*</sup> (0.12)	−0.05 <sub>b</sub> (.05)	0.06 <sub>a</sub> (.06)
Romanticism	.08 <sub>c</sub> (0.03)	0.12 <sub>a</sub> (0.10)	0.21 <sub>c</sub> <sup>*</sup> (0.15 <sup>*</sup> )	−0.01 <sub>a</sub> (−0.03)	−0.08 <sub>b</sub> (−0.11)	−0.01 <sub>a</sub> (−.01)
Anxious Att.	−0.34 <sub>d</sub> <sup>*</sup> (−0.29 <sup>*</sup> )	0.02 <sub>a</sub> (0.04)	−0.12 <sub>a</sub> (−0.11)	−0.19 <sub>c</sub> <sup>*</sup> (−0.15 <sup>*</sup> )	0.31 <sub>c</sub> <sup>*</sup> (0.28 <sup>*</sup> )	−0.08 <sub>a</sub> (−0.05)
Avoidant Att.	−0.41 <sub>d</sub> <sup>*</sup> (−0.25 <sup>*</sup> )	−0.23 <sub>b</sub> <sup>*</sup> (−0.31 <sup>*</sup> )	−0.35 <sub>b</sub> <sup>*</sup> (−0.22 <sup>*</sup> )	−0.21 <sub>c</sub> <sup>*</sup> (−0.13)	0.16 <sub>a</sub> <sup>*</sup> (0.15)	−0.11 <sub>a</sub> (−0.13)

**Note:** Correlations within columns with different subscripts are significantly different from each other at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Numbers in parentheses are standardized betas controlling for the overlap among relationship variables.

<sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ .

distribution ( $Mean = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) and acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ).

### 3. Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of all relationship variables, along with the inter-correlations and internal consistencies. Table 2 shows the correlations of all relationship predictors with the Big Five traits and self-esteem.

First, Table 1 replicates previous research (Jones, 2015) demonstrating that emophilia, as measured by the EP-Scale, is not redundant with any of the key relationship variables in the present study; the EP-Scale's largest correlation was with the SOI ( $r = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Table 2 shows that all relationship variables had unique patterns of association with self-esteem and the Big Five both in regression and raw correlation. For example, anxious attachment is associated with significantly lower self-esteem than is emophilia. Given that anxious attachment is associated with a “you're ok, I'm not ok” framework towards the world, this finding makes sense (Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999). Further, sociosexuality is associated with significantly lower agreeableness than is emophilia, which also replicates prior research (Schmitt, 2004).

Sociosexuality, avoidant, and anxious attachment also had familiar patterns of correlations with the Big Five. Importantly, sociosexuality was negatively correlated with agreeableness (e.g., Schmitt, 2004; Simpson, Wilson, & Winterheld, 2004) and was overall unrelated to self-esteem (Schmitt, 2005). Taken together, these correlations suggest that the three variables are distinct in their patterns with both the Big Five and self-esteem. Specifically, anxious attachment was associated with to low self-esteem and high neuroticism, replicating previous research (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), which were different correlations than emophilia had with these variables. These results differentiate emophilia from related constructs such as sexual promiscuity from anxious attachment (both of which were overall unrelated to neuroticism and self-esteem).

### 4. Discussion

The present study explored the patterns of correlations that six major relationship variables had with the Big Five personality traits and self-esteem. A particular focus, however, was on examining whether emophilia could be explained through existing relationship or personality variables. Based on the findings of the present research, it appears that it does.

Specifically, emophilia was not associated with a disagreeable nature as was the case with sociosexuality. Further, emophilia was not associated with low self-esteem or high neuroticism as was the case with anxious attachment. In this way, emophilia appears redundant with neither anxious attachment nor sociosexuality. Further, emophilia had non-significant correlations with the Big Five and self-esteem.

There are several limitations to the present research, including the exclusive use of self-reports in assessing personality. Future research would bolster these findings by using peer assessments or longitudinal designs to assess relationship functioning and styles. Further, the

findings were based on a sample drawn from a single population (MTurk workers). Although MTurk is a reliable source of data (Buhrmester et al., 2011), there is reason to believe that emophilia may behave differently in adolescent, older adult, or student populations. Thus, it may be prudent to temper generalizing the findings until such samples are examined. Another limitation of the present research was that an older measure of sociosexuality was used (see Penke & Asendorpf, 2008).

Limitations notwithstanding, the present study explored the correlations between everyday individual differences such as the Big Five and self-esteem with several key relationship variables. Although the findings of the present research does not speak to the importance of emophilia directly, it does signal that emophilia is not redundant with related constructs or everyday personality. This information alone is important because it refutes the argument that emophilia is simply a manifestation of anxious attachment. In fact, the findings suggest that none of these relationship variables are redundant. Thus, comprehensive investigations of relationship orientation should carefully consider each of these variables for inclusion when theoretically relevant.

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