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PLAYING FOR SAME TEAM? HOW TEAM ATTITUDES PREDICT RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION UNDER SHADOW OF DARK PERSONALITY TRAITS

Elizabeth Reyes-Fournier
Lecturer, University of Maine at Presque Isle, Presque Isle, United States
elizabeth.reyesfournier@maine.edu

Paul Reyes-Fournier
Lecturer, University of Maine at Presque Isle, Presque Isle, United States
paul.reyesfournier@maine.edu

Robert Reyes-Fournier
Graduate Student, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands
bobby.reyes-fournier@ru.nl

Abstract

The present study examined teamwork attitudes and personality traits as predictors of relationship satisfaction in 500 adults. Teamwork attitudes were examined alongside Big Five and Dark Triad traits. Teamwork attitudes were positively associated with relationship satisfaction and emerged as the strongest bivariate predictor. Mediation analyses indicated that narcissism was positively associated with teamwork attitudes, which were subsequently associated with greater relationship satisfaction. Psychopathy demonstrated a different pattern: higher psychopathy was associated with less favorable teamwork attitudes, which in turn were associated with lower relationship

satisfaction. Moderation analysis further indicated that teamwork attitudes moderated the psychopathy–relationship satisfaction association; psychopathy was unrelated to satisfaction at low teamwork levels but positively associated with satisfaction at moderate and high levels. Findings suggest that teamwork orientation may represent an important interpersonal context through which personality traits are associated with romantic relationship satisfaction.

Keywords:
Teamwork Attitudes, Relationship Satisfaction, Dark Triad, Big Five, Narcissism, Psychopathy

1. Introduction

Romantic relationship quality is associated with psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and physical and mental health (Proulx et al., 2007; Robles et al., 2014). Personality represents an important predictor of how adults experience intimate relationships, potentially influencing emotional responding, communication, and conflict management (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Malouff et al., 2010). Romantic partnerships also require characteristics associated with effective teamwork, including communication, cooperation, mutual support, and coordination toward shared goals (Baker et al., 2010). The present study, therefore, examined teamwork attitudes alongside normative and socially aversive personality traits as predictors of relationship satisfaction.

1.2 Personality and Relationship Satisfaction

The Five-Factor Model (Big Five) conceptualizes personality through openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Meta-analytic research indicates that lower neuroticism and higher agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion are associated with greater relationship satisfaction (Malouff et al., 2010). Large dyadic studies similarly demonstrate meaningful associations between personality and relationship satisfaction (Dyrenforth et al., 2010).

Socially aversive traits may provide additional insight into relationship functioning. The Dark Triad comprises Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Characteristics including manipulation, entitlement, self-interest, and callousness may conflict with the trust and reciprocity required in intimate relationships. Machiavellianism has been associated with lower relationship satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Brewer & Abell, 2017),

while Dark Triad traits have been associated with attachment, accommodation, and interpersonal control (Brewer et al., 2018). Kardum et al. (2024) similarly identified actor and partner effects of Dark Triad traits on relationship satisfaction.

1.3 Teamwork Attitudes and Relationship Satisfaction

Teamwork involves communication, mutual support, coordination, and the pursuit of shared objectives (Baker et al., 2010). Although typically studied in organizational and healthcare contexts, romantic partnerships share characteristics of interdependent teams. Partners coordinate responsibilities, negotiate preferences, communicate needs, and pursue shared goals. Interdependence theory similarly proposes that outcomes within close relationships depend on the coordination of partners' preferences and behaviors (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

Individuals who value cooperation and shared responsibility may therefore approach romantic relationships differently from those with less favorable teamwork attitudes. Teamwork may also interact with personality characteristics that facilitate or interfere with cooperation. However, teamwork attitudes have received comparatively little attention in relationship research.

The present study examined associations among teamwork attitudes, Big Five traits, Dark Triad traits, and relationship satisfaction. Positive teamwork attitudes were expected to predict greater satisfaction. Higher agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and lower neuroticism were expected to predict greater satisfaction, whereas Machiavellianism and psychopathy were expected to be negatively associated with satisfaction. Given the interpersonal complexity of narcissism, its relationship with satisfaction was expected to be less straightforward (Brewer & Abell, 2017; Kardum et al., 2024).

2. Method

2.1 Participants and Procedure

Participants were 500 adults aged 18 years or older recruited through CloudResearch Connect (CloudResearch Connect, n.d.). Participants completed an anonymous SurveyMonkey questionnaire following informed consent. The survey included demographic questions and measures of personality, Dark Triad traits, teamwork attitudes, and relationship satisfaction. Participation was voluntary, and no directly identifying information was collected.

2.2 Measures

Big Five personality: Personality was assessed using the 10-item Big Five Inventory (BFI-10; Rammstedt & John, 2007), measuring extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

Dark Triad: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy were assessed using the 27-item Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014), with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of each trait.

***Relationship satisfaction*:** Relationship satisfaction was measured using the seven-item Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988), with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction.

***Teamwork attitudes*:** Teamwork attitudes were assessed using the Teamwork Expectations and Attitudes Measure (TEAM; Stobbe et al., 2023), with higher scores representing more positive teamwork orientations.

2.3 Data Analysis

Pearson correlations were used to examine bivariate associations among teamwork attitudes, personality traits, and relationship satisfaction. Stepwise multiple regression was used to identify variables that independently predicted relationship satisfaction. Indirect and conditional effects involving Dark Triad traits and teamwork attitudes were subsequently examined using PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2022). Mediation analyses used Model 4 and moderation analysis used Model 1 with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$.

3. Results

3.1 Participant Characteristics

The sample consisted of 500 adults (n=500), primarily identifying as men (50.8%) or women (47.4%). The largest age groups were 35–44 (31.1%), 25–34 (23.2%), and 45–54 years (18.8%). Participants were primarily married (52.2%), single (22.2%), or cohabiting (13.6%), and 95.4% of those who reported their primary language identified English.

3.2 Correlations and Regression

Relationship satisfaction was positively associated with teamwork attitudes, $r = .27$, $p < .001$, agreeableness, $r = .20$, $p < .001$, and conscientiousness, $r = .12$, $p = .003$, and negatively associated with neuroticism, $r = -.20$, $p < .001$. Extraversion and openness were nonsignificant. Narcissism was positively associated with satisfaction, $r = .24$, $p < .001$, and Machiavellianism

demonstrated a small positive association, $r = .08$, $p = .034$; psychopathy was nonsignificant. Teamwork attitudes demonstrated the strongest bivariate association with relationship satisfaction.

A stepwise multiple regression was conducted to identify significant predictors of relationship satisfaction from teamwork attitudes, Big Five traits, and Dark Triad traits. Teamwork attitudes entered at Step 1 and explained 7.3% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, $R^2 = .073$, $F(1, 498) = 39.46$, $p < .001$. Narcissism entered at Step 2 and explained an additional 3.7% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .037$, $\Delta F(1, 497) = 20.91$, $p < .001$. Agreeableness entered at Step 3 and explained an additional 1.3%, $\Delta R^2 = .013$, $\Delta F(1, 496) = 7.27$, $p = .007$. The final model explained 12.4% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .124$, adjusted $R^2 = .118$). In the final model, teamwork attitudes, $B = .098$, $\beta = .197$, $p < .001$, narcissism, $B = .138$, $\beta = .193$, $p < .001$, and agreeableness, $B = .290$, $\beta = .119$, $p = .007$, were significant positive predictors of relationship satisfaction. The remaining Big Five and Dark Triad traits did not meet the stepwise criteria for inclusion.

3.3 Mediation Analyses

PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) was used to examine indirect associations. Narcissism significantly predicted more positive teamwork attitudes, $B = 3.385$, $SE = .863$, $p < .001$, and teamwork attitudes predicted greater relationship satisfaction while controlling for narcissism, $B = .119$, $SE = .021$, $p < .001$. The indirect effect of narcissism on relationship satisfaction through teamwork attitudes was significant, $B = .403$, Boot$SE = .121$, 95% bootstrap CI [.188, .664]. Narcissism retained a significant direct association with satisfaction, $B = 1.745$, $p < .001$.

A second mediation analysis examined teamwork attitudes as a mediator of the association between psychopathy and relationship satisfaction. Psychopathy predicted less positive teamwork attitudes, $B = -.209$, $SE = .063$, $p = .001$, while teamwork attitudes positively predicted satisfaction, $B = .141$, $SE = .022$, $p < .001$. The indirect effect was significant, $B = -.029$, Boot$SE = .011$, 95% bootstrap CI [−.052, −.010]. Psychopathy demonstrated a small positive direct association with satisfaction after teamwork attitudes were controlled, $B = .062$, $p = .045$, indicating inconsistent mediation.

3.4 Moderation Analysis

PROCESS Model 1 examined whether teamwork attitudes moderated the association between psychopathy and relationship satisfaction. The interaction was significant, $B = .008$, $SE = .003$, $p = .013$, 95% CI [.002, .014], $\Delta R^2 = .011$. Psychopathy was unrelated to satisfaction at

low teamwork attitudes, $B = .003$, $p = .944$, but positively associated with satisfaction at moderate, $B = .074$, $p = .017$, and high teamwork attitudes, $B = .145$, $p = .001$. Thus, the conditional association between psychopathy and satisfaction became more positive as teamwork attitudes increased.

4. Discussion

The present study examined whether teamwork attitudes and personality characteristics were associated with relationship satisfaction in adults. Teamwork attitudes emerged as the strongest bivariate correlate of relationship satisfaction and, when entered first in the stepwise regression, accounted for 7.3% of its variance. Narcissism and agreeableness contributed additional explanatory value, with the final model accounting for 12.4% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. Consistent with previous research, agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, whereas neuroticism was negatively correlated (Malouff et al., 2010). More unexpectedly, narcissism was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, while psychopathy demonstrated no significant zero-order association and did not enter the stepwise regression. The mediation and moderation analyses, however, revealed that the associations involving Dark Triad traits were more complex when teamwork attitudes were considered.

The findings involving narcissism suggest that teamwork orientation may partially account for its positive association with relationship satisfaction. Higher narcissism was associated with more positive teamwork attitudes, which in turn were associated with greater relationship satisfaction. The significant indirect effect suggests that some of the association between narcissism and satisfaction may operate through a favorable orientation toward cooperation and teamwork. Narcissism also retained a significant direct association with satisfaction after teamwork attitudes were considered, indicating that teamwork did not fully account for the relationship. Although narcissism is often associated with interpersonal difficulties, subclinical narcissism may include agentic characteristics such as confidence, assertiveness, and positive self-perceptions that function differently across interpersonal contexts. Alternatively, because teamwork attitudes and relationship satisfaction were self-reported, individuals higher in narcissism may evaluate both their interpersonal capabilities and relationships more favorably. Partner reports and behavioral measures will be necessary to distinguish these possibilities.

Psychopathy demonstrated a contrasting and nuanced pattern. Although psychopathy was not significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction and did not enter the stepwise regression, higher psychopathy was associated with less favorable teamwork attitudes. In turn, more favorable teamwork attitudes were associated with greater relationship satisfaction. The significant negative indirect effect therefore suggests that psychopathic traits may be associated with lower relationship satisfaction through a less collaborative interpersonal orientation. At the same time, psychopathy demonstrated a small positive direct association with satisfaction after teamwork attitudes were statistically controlled. These opposing direct and indirect effects are consistent with an inconsistent mediation pattern and may help explain why psychopathy showed essentially no zero-order association with relationship satisfaction.

The moderation analysis further clarified this finding. Teamwork attitudes significantly moderated the association between psychopathy and relationship satisfaction, although the interaction accounted for a modest additional 1.1% of the variance. Psychopathy was unrelated to satisfaction among participants with low teamwork attitudes but was positively associated with satisfaction at moderate and high levels of teamwork attitudes. Thus, the association between psychopathic traits and self-reported relationship satisfaction differed according to individuals' teamwork orientation. This finding should not be interpreted as evidence that psychopathic traits improve romantic relationships. Rather, it suggests that the interpersonal implications of subclinical psychopathic characteristics may depend partly on other orientations that influence how individuals approach cooperation, shared goals, and interdependence.

These findings support the potential value of conceptualizing romantic partnerships through a teamwork framework. Close relationships require partners to coordinate responsibilities, negotiate competing needs, communicate, provide mutual support, and pursue shared goals, processes consistent with interdependence theory (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Importantly, however, the TEAM measure assesses attitudes and expectations toward teamwork rather than actual collaborative behavior between romantic partners. The present findings therefore indicate that a favorable orientation toward teamwork is associated with relationship satisfaction, but they do not establish that participants engaged in more effective teamwork within their relationships. Future research should directly assess couple-level teamwork behaviors to determine whether they explain the associations observed here.

Secondary analyses using threshold-defined Dark Triad categories further highlighted the complexity of these associations. When Dark Triad traits were treated categorically, psychopathy status emerged as a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction after teamwork attitudes were entered, whereas continuous psychopathy did not enter the stepwise model. Narcissism status also contributed significantly to the categorical model. The final model accounted for 14.0% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, compared with 12.4% when Dark Triad traits were modeled continuously. These findings suggest that associations involving socially aversive traits may vary according to how those characteristics are operationalized and may not be fully represented by simple linear relationships. However, because categorizing continuous traits can alter statistical relationships and reduce information, these findings should be considered exploratory and require replication.

Several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design prevents conclusions regarding temporal ordering or causality. The mediation analyses identify significant indirect associations but cannot establish that personality characteristics cause teamwork attitudes or that teamwork attitudes subsequently cause relationship satisfaction. Second, all constructs were measured through self-report, increasing the possibility of common-method variance and response biases. This limitation may be particularly important for narcissism and psychopathy because participants' perceptions of their own teamwork capabilities and relationship satisfaction may differ from their partners' perceptions. Third, the psychopathy effects were relatively small, and the moderation interaction accounted for only a modest increase in explained variance. Additionally, stepwise regression is data-driven and may capitalize on sample-specific variation; consequently, the final predictor set should be replicated in independent samples. Finally, the use of brief personality measures and an online sample may limit measurement depth and generalizability.

Future research should employ longitudinal and dyadic designs to clarify the direction and interpersonal nature of these relationships. Collecting data from both partners would permit actor–partner interdependence analyses examining whether an individual's personality and teamwork orientation predict both their own and their partner's relationship satisfaction. This distinction may be important for Dark Triad traits because an individual reporting high relationship satisfaction does not indicate that their partner experiences the relationship similarly. Future studies should also distinguish general attitudes toward teamwork from actual couple-level

behaviors, including communication, cooperation, mutual support, shared decision-making, conflict management, and goal coordination. Replication of the psychopathy interaction is particularly warranted to determine whether teamwork orientation reliably alters the association between psychopathic traits and relationship functioning.

Teamwork attitudes emerged as a meaningful correlate and predictor of relationship satisfaction and provided important context for understanding associations involving Dark Triad traits. Teamwork attitudes partially accounted for the positive association between narcissism and relationship satisfaction and revealed a more complex pattern involving psychopathy, including a negative indirect association and a significant conditional effect. These findings suggest that personality characteristics may be better understood in conjunction with broader interpersonal orientations rather than in isolation. Viewing romantic relationships as interdependent partnerships may therefore offer a useful framework for understanding how personality and collaborative orientations jointly relate to relationship satisfaction.

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