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**GELISTET IN SCOPUS (Elsevier B.V.) und
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WHAT MAKES A GOOD RELATIONSHIP?

Predictors of existential fulfilment in heterosexual romantic relationships

ELENA M. UKOLOVA, VLADIMIR B. SHUMSKIY, EVGENY N. OSIN

The study aimed to explore the predictors of existential fulfilment in close relationship, an operationalization of relationship quality based on A. Längle's existential analytic approach, using a cross-sectional design. The participants were 309 adults who completed an online questionnaire. We used the Test of Existential Motivations in Relationships, a 36-item instrument measuring the fulfilment of 4 fundamental motivations, together with measures of subjective well-being, positive self-attitude, alienation, and psychopathology, controlling for age, gender, and relationship length. Existential fulfilment in relationships showed theoretically predictable weak to moderate correlations with other study variables. Moderation analysis discovered several effects: 1) subjective happiness was more strongly associated with fulfilment in long-term relationships than in short-term ones, 2) psychopathology, self-understanding, and alienation in relationships were stronger predictors of fulfilment in relationships for older adults than for younger adults, 3) positive attitude towards oneself was associated with fulfilment in relationships for males, but not for females. The attitude towards oneself and alienation indicators remained significant predictors of existential fulfilment in relationships after psychopathology was controlled for. The findings are discussed in the context of existential analytic theory. Longitudinal studies are needed to uncover the underlying causal links, but the present findings support the validity of existential analytic approach to relationship quality.

KEYWORDS: existential fulfilment, fundamental existential motivations, romantic relationships, authenticity, attitude towards oneself, psychopathology.

WAS MACHT EINE GUTE BEZIEHUNG AUS? PRÄDIKTOREN EXISTENZIELLER ERFÜLLUNG IN HETEROSEXUELLEN ROMANTISCHEN BEZIEHUNGEN.

Die Studie zielt darauf ab, Prädiktoren existentieller Erfüllung in engen Beziehungen zu untersuchen, eine Operationalisierung von Beziehungsqualität anhand von A. Längles existenzanalytischem Zugang, mit Verwendung einer Querschnittsgestaltung. Teilnehmer waren 309 Erwachsene, die einen Online-Fragebogen ausfüllten. Wir verwendeten den Test zur Bemessung existentieller Motivationen in zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen, ein 36-Item Forschungsinstrument, das die Erfüllung der 4 Grundmotivationen, als auch Werte zum subjektiven Wohlbefinden, zur positiven Einstellung sich selbst gegenüber, zur Entfremdung, und auch zur Psychopathologie, nach Alter, Geschlecht und Beziehungsdauer feststellt. Die existenzielle Erfüllung in Beziehungen wiesen theoretisch vorhersehbare schwache bis mäßige Korrelationen mit anderen Studienvariablen auf. Die Moderationsanalyse entdeckte einige Wirkungen: 1) subjektive Zufriedenheit wurde stärker verbunden mit Erfüllung in Langzeit- als in Kurzzeitbeziehungen 2) Psychopathologie, Verständnis für sich selbst, und Entfremdung in Beziehungen waren stärkere Prädiktoren von Erfüllung in Beziehungen für ältere als für jüngere Erwachsene 3) positive Einstellung sich selbst gegenüber wurde assoziiert mit Erfüllung in Beziehungen für Männer, nicht für Frauen. Indikatoren der Einstellung sich selbst gegenüber, und der Entfremdung, blieben signifikante Prädiktoren existentieller Erfüllung in Beziehungen nachdem die Psychopathologie bestimmt wurde. Die Ergebnisse werden diskutiert im Kontext der existenzanalytischen Theorie. Longitudinalstudien waren nötig um die ursächlichen Zusammenhänge zu enthüllen, die aktuellen Ergebnisse stützen jedoch die Gültigkeit des existenzanalytischen Zugangs zur Beziehungsqualität.

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER: existenzielle Erfüllung, existenzielle Grundmotivationen, romantische Beziehungen, Authentizität, Einstellung sich selbst gegenüber, Psychopathologie

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Contemporary society provides opportunities for men and women to satisfy their social, economic, and sexual needs without engaging in long-term close relationships. However, common sense suggests that establishing a successful romantic relationship is one of the most important human goals. This is in line with scientific evidence showing that satisfaction with close relationship is an important predictor of health and well-being (Hofer & Busch 2011; Patrick, Knee, Canevell & Lonsbary 2007), as well as of successful achievement of life goals outside the context of relationships

(Hofmann, Finkel & Fitzsimons 2015). In a previous study we found that individuals who experience the possibility of being authentic in a relationship and see the future of this relationship report higher existential fulfilment in life (Ukolova, Shumskiy & Osin 2014).

Nowadays, individuals are not devoted to social norms or standards regulating the choice of a partner, engagement into or continuation of a relationship. What, then, is the basis for the choice of a partner? As Carl Jung once put it, «The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed» (Jung 1933, 49). What are the factors that explain this mutual

attraction and transformation?

Two principles aimed at explaining this mutual attraction and transformation have been proposed by authors belonging to the psychodynamic approach, *the complementation principle* and *the similarity principle*.

The first point of view has been put forth, among others, by J. Willi (2002), who argued that individuals engage in close relationships in order to compensate for their own psychological deficiencies. Thus, a narcissistic man in need of constant admiration can form a steady partnership with an anxious, indecisive woman who needs external guidance in making life decisions. Similarly, a shy man can form a couple with a hysteric woman who is easily able to establish a multitude of superficial interpersonal contacts. According to J. Willi, the problem with such unions is the mutual obligations they impose upon partners which may prevent personal development. If one member of the couple starts to change under the influence of internal factors or external circumstances, the balance of the couple may be impaired, leading to a breakup.

The second point of view has been advocated by R. Skynner, arguing that a man and a woman unconsciously choose each other based on an intuitive perception of the similarity in their family background (Skynner, Cleese 1984). According to this theory, we choose partners with a similar childhood history or similar family problems, such as early rejection by parents, emotionally charged separation of parents at a similar period of the child's age, death of a parent, etc. As a result, the partner is experienced as "being the same as I" or "created for me", because he or she carries a similar traumatic experience and repressed emotions, and we feel understood and accepted in this relationship, despite having common weaknesses. According to R. Skynner, the partners can develop in such unions by providing each other with help and support in order to overcome the fears, discover the repressed emotions, and integrate the traumatic experience into a consistent view of the world and oneself.

Whether the principle of complementation or similarity (independently or in combination) applies, *psychodynamic factors* play an important role in the development of a close relationship by creating an *unconscious emotional attraction* between the partners who strive to satisfy their psychodynamic needs.

Another principle underlying the dynamics of romantic relationships is that of *individuation vs. mutuality*. In the context of this dichotomy C. Whitaker (1989) described 11 developmental stages of a close relationship, showing, somewhat paradoxically, that the more individualized a person becomes, the more easily and readily he or she can interact with other people and unite with them to form relationships. An indivi-

dualized person does not face the fear of losing oneself in a close relationship by being able to be oneself and, at the same time, to be together. Other, contradictory views on this dichotomy can be found in earlier work. Thus, H. Sullivan (1968) believed that close relationships enable the development of identity, whereas E. Erikson (1993) saw a mature identity as a precondition for engaging in successful close relationships.

According to contemporary existential analysis, partners are drawn to each other by love and by the striving for existential fulfilment in a close relationship. According to the theory of existential fundamental motivations, a close relationship provides partners with support, protection, and life space, gives them an experience of warmth, emotional contact, and the joy of life, enables them to remain true to themselves, maintaining their individuality and autonomy and feeling respected for being oneself, holding one's views and values. Close relationship also provides a meaningful horizon of common future filled with joint projects and goals that motivate the partners to stay together (Längle 2003, 2016).

The theory of existential fundamental motivation also allows explaining the psychodynamics of close relationship. A phenomenological study has found that the choice of a partner is more readily described by the principle of complementation related to the content of existential fundamental motivations: we choose a partner who is able to compensate our deficit of support and protection, intimacy and warmth, self-respect or meaning in life (Karnatskaya & Shumskiy 2015). If one of the partners ceases to fulfil this "existential deficiency" of another or the latter learns to satisfy his/her existential need independently, the relationship often faces a crisis, which usually leads to a breakup.

An important statement made by existential analysis is that a close relationship involves a tension between the two extremes of affirming oneself and discovering oneself in the Other (Längle 2015). In a relationship, an individual strives, on the one hand, to remain true to oneself, maintain one's own individuality, autonomy, authenticity and, on the other hand, to devote oneself to the partner who helps one to discover oneself and to become oneself more fully. Although psychodynamic attraction may stimulate the formation of a close relationship, often playing the key role at initial stages, a fulfilling relationship may not develop without respect for the partner and, at the same time, without a good relationship to oneself. Thus, contemporary existential analysis proposes an integrated approach to understanding close relationships, describing both the psychodynamic factors underlying the development of relationships, as well as the dynamics related to the personal being of the partners, their relationship to themselves

and possibility to be authentic in a close relationship.

Earlier we presented a psychometric instrument based on the theory of existential fundamental motivations by A. Längle, the Test of Existential Motivations in Interpersonal Relationships (TEMIR), aimed to provide a quantitative assessment of the existential fulfilment experienced in close relationships (Ukolova, Shumskiy & Osin 2014). The present study aims to investigate the associations of existential fulfilment in relationship with positive attitudes to oneself, authentic living, well-being and ill-being.

METHODS

Participants

The participants were anonymous volunteers recruited online using snowball sampling approach in social networks. We sought respondents who were involved in a close interpersonal relationship with a person of opposite sex at the time of the study.

The sample (N=309) included 30.1% males and 69.9% females aged 16 to 54 (M=24.8, SD=6.23). Most respondents (84.6%) had higher or incomplete higher education. The term of involvement in a close relationship varied from 1 month to 28 years (M=3.40, SD=3.93, median=2.17 years).

Instruments

Test of Existential Motivations in Interpersonal Relationships (TEMIR: Ukolova, Shumski & Osin 2014) based on the theory of A. Längle. This 36-item questionnaire includes 4 scales: «Trust in relationships» (1st FM), «Value of life in relationships» (2nd FM), «Authenticity in relationships» (3rd FM), «Meaning of relationships» (4th FM), and a general index of Existential Fulfilment in Relationships (EFir). The respondents were asked to answer the items with respect to the close relationship in which they were involved at the time of study.

Well-being was assessed using Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin 1985; Osin & Leontiev 2008) and Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper 1999; Osin & Leontiev 2008). Psychodynamic traits were measured by Mini-Mult, a brief 71-item Russian questionnaire (Zaitsev 1981) based on MMPI (Kincannon 1968).

Perceived Alienation Questionnaire (Maddi, Kobasa & Hoover 1979) developed on the basis of the existential neurosis theory (Maddi 1967) measures 4 forms of alienation (vegetativeness, powerlessness, nihilism, adventurousness) across 5 life domains (work, society, relationships, family, self).

Self-Attitude Questionnaire (SAQ) (Stolin & Pan-tileev 1988), a 57-item measure based on a hierarchical

model of the attitude towards oneself. It includes an overall attitude towards oneself index, 4 scales measuring general aspects of attitude towards oneself (self-respect, self-sympathy, expectation of others' attitude, self-interest), and 7 scales measuring its specific behavioral manifestations (self-assurance, perception of others' attitude, self-acceptance, self-guidance, self-blame, self-interest, self-understanding).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Correlates of existential fulfilment in relationships

The 4 dimensions of existential fulfilment in relationships were highly intercorrelated (Pearson r in the .75 to .87 range, $p < .001$), suggesting that the perceived existential fulfilment in a relationship is associated with fulfilment of all 4 existential motivations, which corresponds to our earlier findings (Ukolova, Shumsky & Osin 2014).

First, we used Spearman correlations to look for the associations of existential fulfilment with demographic variables. Only age showed weak negative association with existential fulfilment in relationships ($\rho = -0.13$, $p < .05$). We did not find any significant associations of sex, education or relationship length with TEMIR scales.

We proceeded by studying the psychological correlates of existential fulfilment in relationships.

Subjective happiness and psychopathology

The associations of existential fulfilment in relationships with subjective happiness, satisfaction with life, and psychopathology are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson correlations of Existential Fulfilment in Interpersonal Relationships with well-being and psychopathology (N=309)

	1 st FM	2 nd FM	3 rd FM	4 th FM	EFir
Satisfaction with Life Scale	0.62***	0.58***	0.56***	0.65***	0.65***
Subjective Happiness Scale	0.38***	0.34***	0.36***	0.43***	0.41***
Hypochondriasis (Hs)	-0.22***	-0.20***	-0.26***	-0.25***	-0.25***
Depression (De)	-0.39***	-0.34***	-0.40***	-0.42***	-0.42***
Hysteria (Hy)	-0.35***	-0.32***	-0.39***	-0.36***	-0.38***
Psychopathy (Pd)	-0.41***	-0.33***	-0.42***	-0.42***	-0.43***
Paranoia (Pa)	-0.34***	-0.28***	-0.35***	-0.31***	-0.34***
Psychasthenia (Pt)	-0.33***	-0.28***	-0.34***	-0.35***	-0.35***
Schizophrenia (Sc)	-0.31***	-0.27***	-0.35***	-0.31***	-0.33***
Hypomania (Ma)	-0.13*	-0.10	-0.19**	-0.13*	-0.15**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Existential fulfilment in relationships showed moderate positive associations with general indicators of satisfaction with life and subjective happiness. This is in line with numerous existing findings indicating the important role of relationship satisfaction for overall

psychological well-being.

All the indicators of psychopathology turned out to be weak to moderate negative predictors of existential fulfilment in relationships. The strongest negative correlates were psychopathy, depression, and hysteria, suggesting that these traits are associated with particularly pronounced difficulties in maintaining fulfilling relationships.

Attitude towards oneself and Alienation

The associations of existential fulfilment in relationships with the dimensions of attitude towards oneself are shown in Table 2. Fulfilment in relationships showed weak to moderate positive associations with all the indicators of positive attitude towards oneself measured by SAQ. Out of 11 attitude towards oneself components, EFir exhibited the strongest links with self-interest, expected others' attitude, and self-respect. This suggests that a fulfilling relationship is more likely to be experienced by individuals who treat themselves with interest and respect, and expect the same treatment from others. This finding can be viewed as an empirical validation of the externalization and expectation models of relationships described theoretically in Existential Analysis (Längle 2012): one's attitude to oneself corresponds to the expected attitude from others and to the way that person treats others, resulting in the relationship fulfilment outcomes.

Table 2. Pearson correlations of Existential Fulfilment in Interpersonal Relationships with self-attitude dimensions (N=309)

	1 st FM	2 nd FM	3 rd FM	4 th FM	EFir
General Self-Attitude	0.35***	0.30***	0.35***	0.40***	0.38***
Self-respect	0.29***	0.24***	0.31***	0.30***	0.31***
Self-sympathy	0.19**	0.13*	0.16**	0.23***	0.19**
Expectation of others' att.	0.31***	0.29***	0.29***	0.35***	0.34***
Self-interest	0.25***	0.22***	0.25***	0.34***	0.29***
Self-assurance	0.24***	0.21***	0.26***	0.24***	0.26***
Perception of others' att.	0.15**	0.19**	0.13*	0.24***	0.19**
Self-acceptance	0.24***	0.20***	0.18**	0.29***	0.25***
Self-guidance	0.24***	0.18**	0.20***	0.22***	0.22***
Self-blame	-0.14*	-0.05	-0.14*	-0.13*	-0.13*
Self-interest	0.39***	0.34***	0.38***	0.42***	0.41***
Self-understanding	0.27***	0.22***	0.27***	0.28***	0.28***

Note: *p<0.05, **p < 0.01, *** p < .001.

The associations of existential fulfilment with alienation scales are presented in Table 3. Alienation was moderately negatively correlated with fulfilment in relationships. Across the life spheres, indicators of alienation from self was the strongest correlate of EFir, followed by alienation from relationships and family. This indicates that individuals who experience a fulfilling relationship are able to perceive the value of

their own personality, as well as that of family and relationships. Alienation from larger social contexts of work and society only showed weak associations with existential fulfilment in relationships. Thus, alienation from oneself may be the most detrimental to existential fulfilment in relationships, compared to alienation from wider social contexts. The associations of EFir with forms of alienation were in line with S. Maddi's idea that vegetativeness is the most severe form of existential neurosis, followed by powerlessness, nihilism, and adventurousness.

Table 3. Pearson correlations of Existential Fulfilment in Interpersonal Relationships with perceived alienation scales (N=309)

	1 st FM	2 nd FM	3 rd FM	4 th FM	EFir
General alienation	-0.45	-0.42	-0.38	-0.43	-0.45
Alienation from Work	-0.26	-0.25	-0.23	-0.25	-0.27
Alienation from Society	-0.27	-0.23	-0.23	-0.22	-0.26
Alienation from Relationships	-0.42	-0.41	-0.38	-0.43	-0.44
Alienation from Family	-0.44	-0.42	-0.35	-0.42	-0.44
Alienation from Self	-0.47	-0.44	-0.40	-0.46	-0.48
Vegetativeness	-0.48	-0.45	-0.42	-0.48	-0.49
Powerlessness	-0.41	-0.38	-0.36	-0.40	-0.42
Nihilism	-0.37	-0.35	-0.30	-0.34	-0.37
Adventurousness	-0.35	-0.32	-0.26	-0.28	-0.32

Note: all associations are significant at p < .001.

Gender, age and relationship length as moderating variables

In order to investigate whether the correlations described above hold across gender, age, and for relationships of different length, we performed moderation analyses using multiple regression framework in Mplus 7.3 (robust MLR estimator). We performed these analyses with one psychological predictor variable at a time. We entered gender, age, relationship length, and the predictor variable, as well as three interaction terms of the predictor with gender, age, and relationship length. Age, relationship length, and the predictor were centered prior to calculating the interaction term.

Subjective happiness and psychopathology

Subjective happiness was differentially associated with fulfilment in relationships of different length ($\beta = .12, p < .05$). For individuals describing longer-term relationships the association between fulfilment in the relationship and overall happiness was stronger, compared to relationships of shorter length (see Figure 1). For relationships spanning less than 3 years, absence of fulfilment was not associated with lower subjective happiness, but long-term unfulfilling relationships were associated with pronounced decrease in happiness scores. This suggests that individuals who remain

in unfulfilling relationships for a long time tend to become unhappy, but there may or may not be a direct causal connection between these two variables.

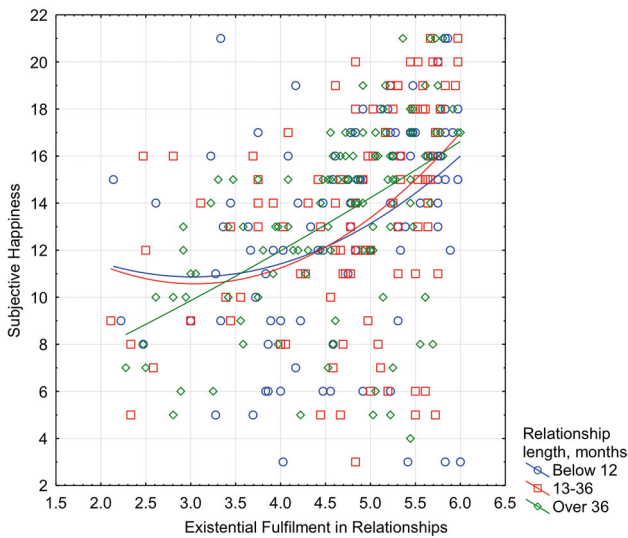


Figure 1: Subjective happiness and fulfilment in relationships of different length

Note: Relationship length below 12 months: $r = .34, p = .001$; 13-36 months: $r = .37, p < .001$; 37 months and over: $r = .52, p < .001$.

We also found significant interactions with age (β in the $-.15$ to $-.27$ range, $p < .05$) for 7 out of 8 psychopathology scales. All of these effects showed a similar pattern, indicating that in older respondents the negative association of psychopathology with relationship fulfilment is

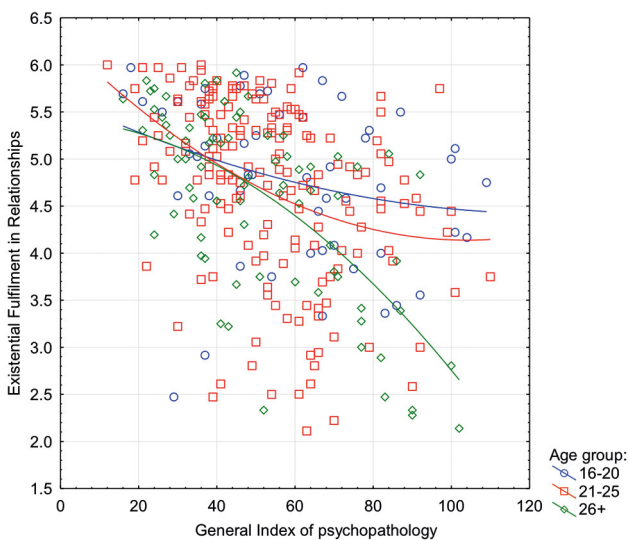


Figure 2: Psychopathology and relationship fulfilment in different age groups

Note: Age group 16-20: $r = -.28, p = .042$; 21-25: $r = -.36, p < .001$; 26 and over: $r = -.65, p < .001$.

stronger than for younger respondents (Figure 2 shows the general index of psychopathology obtained as average for the 8 scales). This effect was established controlling for relationship length which was neither a significant predictor nor moderator of the effects of psychopathology. This may suggest that the effects of psychopathology on relationship quality may be more detrimental for older individuals: in emerging adulthood, relationship difficulties associated with psychopathology may be experienced as temporary or accidental, resulting in a more positive assessment of relationship quality, but at more mature age, when these difficulties are reproduced for many years and with different partners, individuals may become more pessimistic in their evaluation of relationship quality and lose hope for a fulfilling relationship (forming general attributions like “no one can truly understand me” / “all men/women are the same”).

Attitude towards oneself and Alienation

Some components of attitude towards oneself revealed significant interaction effects. We found significant interactions with gender for the effects of self-acceptance ($\beta = -.35, p < .01$) and self-sympathy ($\beta = -.12, p < .01$) on fulfilment in relationships. Both of these associations were significantly weaker for females, compared to males (Figures 3 and 4). This indicates that males experiencing fulfilling relationships also tend to feel more sympathetic and more accepting toward themselves, whereas females in fulfilling relationships may or may not hold positive attitudes towards oneself. One possible explanation is that females may be more focused on maintenance of a stable relationship, even if it involves losing oneself to some extent.

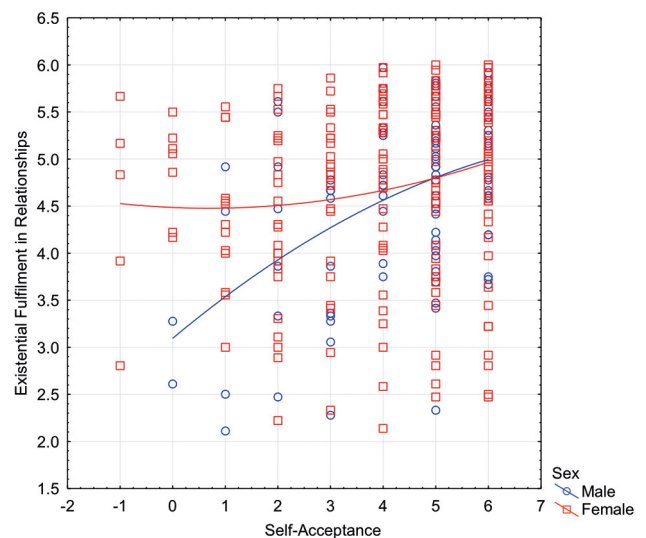


Figure 3: Self-acceptance and fulfilment in relationships in males and females

Note: males: $r = .47, p < .001$, females: $r = .18, p = .009$.

More studies are needed to investigate whether this effect is peculiar to Russian samples and whether self-acceptance is a prerequisite or a consequence of a fulfilling relationship in males.

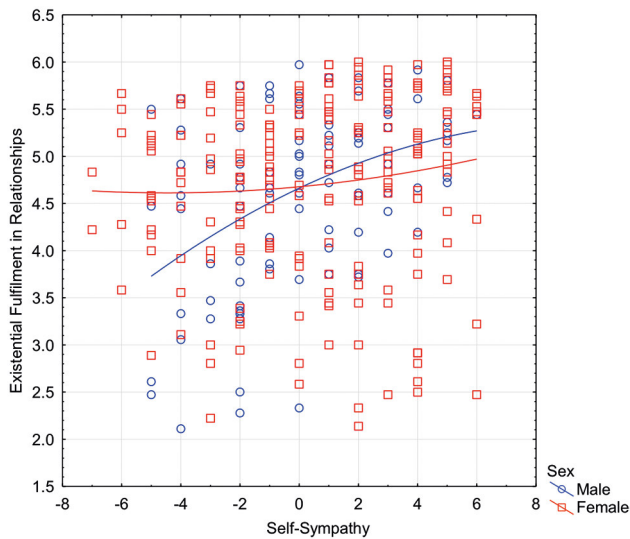


Figure 4: Self-sympathy and fulfilment in relationships in males and females

Note: males: $r = .43, p < .001$; females: $r = .11$, non-significant

The effect of positive expected attitude of others was different for relationships of different length ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$): it was stronger for shorter-term relationships, compared to longer-term ones. This suggests that in short-term relationships perception of expected attitude by the partner and other people in general may coincide, whereas in long-term relationships the perception of the partner’s attitude to oneself becomes differentiated from that of other people in general, he or she progressively gains a special place in one’s mind and is much less likely to be viewed as one of “other people”.

The effect of self-understanding on fulfilment in relationships was stronger for older respondents ($\beta = .15, p < .05$) (see Figure 5). This suggests that lack of self-understanding may become an obstacle to a fulfilling relationship with age.

Alienation only revealed significant interaction effects with age. The associations of alienation in relationships ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$) and powerlessness ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$) with fulfilment in relationships were weaker in younger respondents and stronger in older groups. This suggests that in younger respondents cynical or devaluating attitudes towards relationships may not be an obstacle to experiencing fulfilling relationships as in older respondents. Another possible interpretation is that inability to perceive the value of relationships as a

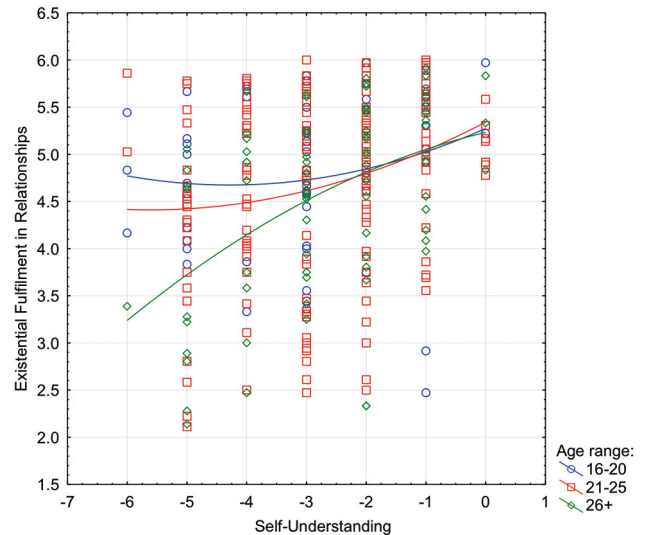


Figure 5: Self-understanding and fulfilment in relationships in different age groups

Note: age group 16-20: $r = .14$, non-significant; 21-25: $r = .25, p < .001$; 26 and over: $r = .47, p < .001$.

whole and a feeling of powerlessness in relationships may result from a series of negative experiences of non-fulfilling close relationships that accumulate with age.

Attitude to oneself and alienation as predictors of fulfilling relationships

Finally, we were interested whether the positive attitude towards oneself and alienation would remain to be significant positive predictors of fulfilling relationships with psychopathology controlled for. To do this, we performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, controlling for respondent sex, age, and relationship length at Step 1, including the 8 psychopathology indicators at Step 2, followed by 11 variables of attitude towards oneself (with exception of the general index) at Step 3, and 5 alienation indicators (life sphere subscales) at Step 4. Because of the large number of variables and potential multicollinearity, we do not report the results for each individual predictor, but focus instead on the variance explained by each group of predictors. The whole model was highly significant (adjusted $R^2 = .35, p < .001$). Demographic variables did not make any significant contribution at Step 1 ($\Delta R^2 = .009$, n.s.), with a significant contribution of psychopathology ($\Delta R^2 = .26, p < .001$) at Step 2. Both groups of attitude towards oneself ($\Delta R^2 = .066, p < .01$) and alienation ($\Delta R^2 = .073, p < .01$) indicators showed incremental validity. This suggests that positive attitude towards oneself and authentic (as opposed to alienated) existence are associated with more fulfilling relationships even when psychopathology is controlled for.

Limitations and Conclusions

The results suggest that authentic (as opposed to alienated) existence and positive self-regard (which is necessary for authenticity) are important predictors of experiencing fulfilment in close heterosexual relationships. Fulfilling relationships are most likely to be experienced by individuals who treat themselves with interest and respect; lack of self-understanding and alienation from oneself are associated with living in non-fulfilling relationships. Because our data is cross-sectional, which is one important limitation of the present study, we are unable to make any causal inferences. Causality may go in both directions, e.g., positive attitude towards oneself may develop in a good relationship and may also be one of the important psychological conditions for a fulfilling relationship.

Because of the cross-sectional nature of the study, the sample of longer-term relationships may be skewed, reflecting an attrition effect, because relatively successful (fulfilling) relationships may persist for a longer time and, therefore, be more likely to appear in our sample of long-term relationships, rather than unfulfilling ones. Longitudinal studies are needed to find out how relationship fulfilment progresses with time and how it may influence the partners' decisions to maintain or to stop the relationship.

Another limitation of the present study is that it does not focus on the phenomenon of love, which is a rather challenging object for studies using quantitative approach.

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