

Direct and indirect effects of relationship status through satisfaction with relationship status and fear of being single on Polish young adults' well-being



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ABSTRACT

The current research tested a model with satisfaction with relationship status and fear of being single as mediators in serial of the linkage relationship status – well-being measured in terms of life satisfaction, emotional and psychological well-being, and depression. Results from a sample of 556 Polish participants aged 20 to 35 ($M = 22.64$, $SD = 3.34$) demonstrated that the link between relationship status and well-being was fully mediated by satisfaction with relationship status and fear of being single operating as separate mediators, as well as by satisfaction with relationship status and fear of being single as mediators in serial. In addition, the indirect effect of relationship status on well-being through satisfaction with relationship status was larger than the indirect effect of relationship status on well-being through satisfaction with relationship status and fear of being single operating in serial.

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1. Introduction

The importance of relationships for people's well-being has been largely recognized by prior researchers and is well-documented in the literature (e.g. Boyce, Wood, & Ferguson, 2016; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). At the same time, this well-established link between marital status or relationship status and well-being has been recently questioned by the results reported by Lehmann et al. (2015). Lehmann et al. (2015) introduced a new theoretical construct of *satisfaction with relationship status*, or *status satisfaction*, which refers to being satisfied with one's current relationship status (i.e. having a partner or not), and demonstrated that it has greater explanatory value in predicting well-being (as measured in terms of life satisfaction and psychological distress) than marital status per se. These new promising findings were also replicated in a recent Polish study (Adamczyk, 2017) in which status satisfaction was found to be a better predictor of life satisfaction, emotional and psychological well-being, and depressive symptoms beyond relationship status. With their study, Lehmann et al. (2015) not only significantly contributed to new knowledge in the field of psychosocial determinants of well-being, but they simultaneously opened a new avenue for further research aimed at

investigating factors that influence status satisfaction and searching for mechanisms by which status satisfaction may affect well-being.

The current study – inspired by Lehmann et al.'s (2015) study – was intended to further explore the link between satisfaction with relationship status and well-being in young adulthood since the issues concerning establishment of an intimate relationship with a spouse or partner still represents a fundamental task and is one of the major goals of important life decision for young people (e.g. Rydz, 2011). Moreover, the current study focuses on well-being measured in terms of life satisfaction, emotional and psychological well-being, and depressive symptoms in line with the notion that focus on positive aspects of health alongside the focus on the lack of problems is essential to provide the comprehensive picture of a human being (Cierpiałkowska & Sęk, 2015; Kaczmarek, 2016; Trzebińska, 2008).

In the attempt to explain the linkage between status satisfaction and well-being, the current study also draws upon a recent study by Spielmann et al. (2013) who introduced a new construct termed *fear of being single* which can be understood as a trait individual difference and as a state. The authors defined fear of being single as “entailing concern, anxiety, or distress regarding the current or prospective experience of being without a romantic partner” (Spielmann et al., 2013, p. 1049), which may be experienced both by single and partnered individuals. Spielmann et al. (2013) found that higher level of fear of being single was associated, among others, with a higher level of depression, loneliness, and the need to belong (Spielmann et al., 2013). Spielmann, MacDonald, Joel, & Impett (2015, p. 8) indicated that fear

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of being single is “an important, unique predictor of romantic outcomes (...)”. Therefore, the current study recognizes the meaningfulness of fear of being single as a new construct and includes it as a possible mediator of the linkage between relationship status and well-being.

1.1. Aims and hypotheses

Inspired by the study by [Lehmann et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Spielmann et al. \(2013, 2015\)](#), the major aim of the current study was to test the serial multiple mediator model with status satisfaction and fear of being single as mediators of the linkage relationship status – well-being. The conceptual model adopted in the current investigation is presented in [Fig. 1](#).

As [Fig. 1](#) depicts, the model postulates the following direct and four indirect effects:

The direct effect of relationships status on well-being is well-established in literature and states that in general single individuals report lower well-being than individuals possessing a spouse/partner (e.g. [Lyubomirsky et al., 2005](#)). Therefore, it was expected that:

Hypothesis 1. Relationship status will have a direct effect on well-being in such a way that partnered status will be related to higher life satisfaction, emotional and psychological well-being, and lower depressive symptoms.

In turn, the four indirect effects of relationship status on well-being include:

The first indirect effect of relationship status on well-being through M_1 (i.e. status satisfaction). It was expected that status satisfaction will fully mediate the linkage between relationship status and well-being, which could explain the lack of predictive role of relationship status for well-being when status satisfaction is introduced in the analysis, as it was noted by [Lehmann et al. \(2015\)](#) and by the present author ([Adamczyk, 2017](#)). Therefore, it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2. Relationship status will have an indirect effect on well-being through status satisfaction in such a way that partnered status will be related to higher status satisfaction, which in turn will be related to higher life satisfaction, emotional and psychological well-being, and lower depressive symptoms.

The second indirect effect of relationship status on well-being included in the model is the indirect effect of relationship status on well-being only through M_2 (i.e. fear of being single). A prior study by [Spielmann et al. \(2013\)](#) found that fear of being single was positively related to depression. Furthermore, fear of being single appears to involve a kind of insecurity and uncertainty about the current or future relationship status. In turn, general and domain-specific insecurity were found

to be negatively associated with mental health (e.g. [Yuan & Wang, 2016](#)). Based on these results it is reasonable to expect that:

Hypothesis 3. Relationship status will have indirect effect on well-being through fear of being single in such a way that partnered status will be related to lower fear of being single, which in turn, will be related to higher life satisfaction, emotional and psychological well-being, and lower depressive symptoms.

The third specific indirect effect is the indirect effect of relationship status on well-being outcomes through M_1 (i.e. status satisfaction) and M_2 (i.e. fear of being single) in serial, with fear of being single understood as a consequent of status satisfaction. This causal relationship was postulated on the basis of: (1) similarity noticed between the fear of being single and anxiety as a state as proposed by [Spielberger \(1972\)](#) and (2) the recognition of status satisfaction as encompasses cognitive appraisal of the objective circumstance of possessing or not a partner as a threat/danger. First, although [Spielmann et al. \(2013, 2015\)](#) did not suggest any resemblance between fear of being single and anxiety as a state, they indicated that fear of being single can be conceptualized at a state level. Referring to the conception of anxiety as a state proposed by [Spielberger \(1972\)](#), who indicated that anxiety as a state is a transitory emotional state or condition caused by cognitive appraisal of external stressor or an internal cue as threatening, we may also look at fear of being single as an emotional state or condition caused by cognitive appraisal of external objective situation of not currently possessing a partner or anticipation of not possessing a partner in the future as threat/danger. Similarly, as elaborated by [Smith & Lazarus \(1993, p. 234\)](#), circumstances (“facts”) are appraised by an individual as significant (in terms of harm or benefit), and this appraisal encompasses “(...) the most proximal cognitive variables that directly result in emotion.” In particular, in regard to fear/anxiety the core relational theme is “danger” or “threat” ([Smith & Lazarus, 1993](#)). With regard to the scope of the current study, we may then postulate that status satisfaction plays a role of cognitive appraisal involved in developing fear of being single. Status satisfaction seems to constitute a cognitive component/evaluation of the objective state of possessing or not a partner as danger/threat for an individual's well-being and development. As a result, in the current study, it was expected that:

Hypothesis 4. Relationship status will have indirect effect on well-being through status satisfaction and fear of being single in serial, in such a way that partnered status will be related to high status satisfaction influencing fear of being single which lower level will be related to higher life satisfaction, emotional and psychological well-being, and lower depressive symptoms.

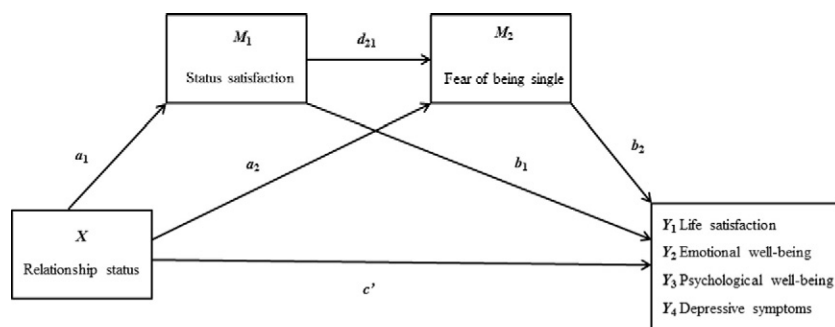


Fig. 1. The Conceptual Serial Mediator Model with Status Satisfaction and Fear of Being Single As Mediators of the Linkage Between Relationship Status and Well-being Outcomes

Fig. 1. The conceptual serial mediator model with status satisfaction and fear of being single as mediators of the linkage between relationship status and well-being outcomes.

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