



Associations between young adult romantic relationship quality and problem behaviors: An examination of personality–environment interactions



Rongqin Yu ^{a,*}, Susan Branje ^a, Loes Keijsers ^a, Wim Meeus ^{a,b}

^a Research Centre Adolescent Development, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

^b Department of Developmental Psychology, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 30 January 2015

Keywords:

Person–environment interaction
Personality types
Romantic relationships
Anxiety
Delinquency

ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study examined person–environment interplay by testing interaction effects between adolescent personality type (i.e., overcontrollers, undercontrollers, and resilient) and young adult romantic relationship quality on young adult delinquency and anxiety. The study employed six waves of longitudinal questionnaire data collected across 10 years from Dutch youths. Results showed that support from romantic partner was related to a relatively stronger decrease in anxiety in young adulthood for overcontrollers than for resilient. Moreover, higher negative interaction with romantic partner was related to a relative increase in delinquent behaviors for undercontrollers, while no such links emerged for overcontrollers and resilient. This study highlights the importance of considering the interplay between personality characteristics and environmental–relational factors when examining young adults' developmental outcomes.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Inc.

1. Introduction

Personality characteristics may predispose individuals to certain problem behaviors, such as delinquency and anxiety (Caspi & Shiner, 2006; Tackett, 2006). These problem symptoms are persistent forms of maladjustment but they show developmental changes (Campbell, 1995). Delinquency peaks around age 17 and declines as individuals enter into adulthood (Bongers, Koot, Van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2003; Farrington, 1986; Piquero, 2008). Concerning anxiety symptoms, recent research suggests an increasing trend when individuals transit from late adolescence to young adulthood (Leadbeater, Thompson, & Gruppuso, 2012). It seems that emerging adulthood is a sensitive developmental period for changes in these problem symptoms. This life phase may afford new social contexts and roles thereby allowing for turning points in developmental pathways (Arnett & Tanner, 2006). When individuals enter into adulthood, the quality of romantic relationships becomes very salient (Collins & Van Dulmen, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Rauer, Pettit, Lansford, Bates, & Dodge, 2013). Prior research has suggested that a high-quality romantic relationship might be linked to relative decreases in problem behaviors,

such as antisocial behavior and emotional maladjustment (e.g., Meeus, Branje, Van der Valk, & De Wied, 2007; Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004). However, there might be also personality differences in the association between quality of romantic relationships and relative changes in problem behaviors. An interactionist perspective would propose that individuals' developmental outcomes depend on the interplay between individual characteristics and environmental factors (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). Thus, it is plausible that the interactions between personality characteristics and relational environment predict individuals' problem behavior pathways. Nevertheless, although interactions between personality and social relationships are frequently suggested in theories of individual development (e.g., Barber, 1992; Caspi, 2000; Magnusson & Stattin, 2006), relatively few empirical studies have been conducted in the context of romantic relationships. The present study tested the interaction effects between adolescent personality types and young adulthood romantic relationship quality on young adults' relative changes in delinquency and anxiety.

1.1. Personality types and problem behaviors

1.1.1. Personality types

There is a growing recognition of the need for a person-centered approach to understand personality and its associations with

* Corresponding author at: Research Centre Adolescent Development, Utrecht University, P.O. Box 80.140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands. Fax: +31 (30) 2532352.

E-mail address: r.yu@uu.nl (R. Yu).

individuals' developmental outcomes. It is important to examine the links with a person-centered approach as it is noted by Robins and Tracy (2003), "it is unlikely that environmental events and contexts ever influence a single trait in isolation." The focus of this study is examining the association between personality and features of romantic relationship. It is more likely that romantic partner interacts with the whole person, not with one trait at a time. Thus, a person centered-approach is adopted in the current study.

Many studies have consistently distinguished three personality types: resilient, undercontrollers and overcontrollers (e.g., Caspi & Shiner, 2006; Robins, John, Caspi, Moffitt, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996). This typology is based on Block and Block's (1980) theory of ego-control and ego-resiliency and has been considered as an important and necessary complement to the dimensional approach that currently dominate personality psychology (Donnellan & Robins, 2010). Ego-control refers to containing vs. expressing emotional and motivational impulses, and ego-resiliency refers to the dynamic capacity of individuals to adjust their modal levels of ego-control, depending on environmental demands (Block & Block, 1980). Resilient are characterized by a high level of ego-resiliency and a medium level of ego-control. Overcontrollers and undercontrollers both have a low level of ego-resiliency, but differ on ego-control. Overcontrollers have a high level of ego-control and undercontrollers have a low level of ego-control (e.g., Robins et al., 1996). These three personality types have been consistently identified across cultures, ethnic groups, and ages using different methods (e.g., Alessandri et al., 2014; Asendorpf, Borkenau, Ostendorf, & Van Aken, 2001; Caspi & Silva, 1995; Chapman & Goldberg, 2011; Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010). Moreover, studies have showed that these three personality types can be reliably constructed using Big Five personality traits (Asendorpf & van Aken, 1999; Dubas, Gerris, Janssens, & Vermulst, 2002; Klimstra et al., 2010). Undercontrollers are characterized by low conscientiousness and agreeableness, resilient have generally high scores on all Big Five dimensions, and overcontrollers typically have low emotional stability, low extraversion, and are comparably agreeable as resilient (Klimstra et al., 2010; Robins et al., 1996).

Prior research has consistently shown that adolescents with these three personality types have different levels of problem behaviors. In general, resilient can respond adaptively and flexibly toward situational demands and are relatively free from problem behaviors, and thus are relatively well adjusted. Overcontrollers and undercontrollers, in contrast, exhibit little adaptive flexibility when encountering environmental challenges and are often considered as more maladjusted than resilient (Block & Block, 1980). In general, overcontrollers are more prone to internalizing problems such as anxiety, while undercontrollers exhibit higher risk of externalizing problems such as delinquency (e.g., Akse, Hale, Engels, Raaijmakers, & Meeus, 2007; De Fruyt, Mervielde, & Van Leeuwen, 2002; Van Aken, Van Lieshout, Scholte, & Haselager, 2002; Van Leeuwen, Mervielde, Braet, & Bosmans, 2004).

1.1.2. Romantic relationship and problem behaviors

Personality types are not the only factor important for understanding youths' problem behaviors. During young adulthood, romantic relationships become more salient (Collins & Van Dulmen, 2006) and, bonds to romantic partners may be linked to decreases in problem behaviors (Furman & Wehner, 1994; Laub & Sampson, 2001). Indeed, a good romantic relationship might provide an important source of support that may be associated with a relative decrease in individuals' insecure feelings such as anxiety. In contrast, negative interactions with a romantic partner could create frustration and hurt, resulting in anger and distrust, which

may be associated with increased antisocial behavior (Larson, Clore, & Wood, 1999). At the same time, young adults that have been able to decrease their problem behaviors might be able to form high quality romantic relationships, characterized by high levels of support and low levels of negative interaction.

Empirical research has shown significant associations between quality of romantic relationships and problem behaviors. For instance, high attachment and support in a romantic relationship appears to be linked with decreases in youths' antisocial behaviors (Meeus, Branje, & Overbeek, 2004; Roisman et al., 2004; Sampson & Laub, 2005). In addition, higher support from a romantic partner proved to be associated with lower social anxiety (La Greca & Harrison, 2005) and high commitment in a romantic relationship in young adulthood was associated with a relative decrease in emotional adjustment (Meeus et al., 2007). In sum, these studies suggest that high-quality romantic relationships in early adulthood are associated with low levels and relative decreases in problem behaviors.

1.1.3. Adolescent personality types, young adulthood romantic relationship quality, and young adults' problem behaviors

Apart from main effects that personality types and romantic relationship may have on young adults' problem behaviors, they may also reinforce each other through a developmental interplay. According to person–environment interaction theory, the interaction between individual characteristics (i.e., personality) and environment (i.e., romantic relationship) contributes to the development of individuals' problem behaviors (Barber, 1992; Caspi, 2000; Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). In line with this theory, differential susceptibility theory (Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2007) proposes that environments might differently affect the development of youths with different personality characteristics. That is, some individuals are more susceptible to environmental influences than others are.

Empirical research using a person-centered approach to personality, mostly cross-sectional in nature, supports this theoretical notion in the context of family and peer relationships. Specifically, undercontrollers with highly restrictive vs. less restrictive parents showed greater differences in depressed affect and internalizing behaviors than did resilient and overcontrollers (Dubas et al., 2002). Another study reported that parents of undercontrollers rated their children as significantly higher on externalizing behavior than parents of resilient, with the greatest difference occurring for undercontrollers exposed to high levels of negative parental control, whereas the difference in externalizing behavior between undercontrollers and resilient faded when the level of negative parental control was low (Van Leeuwen et al., 2004). In addition, parents of overcontrollers rated their children significantly higher on internalizing behavior than did parents of resilient, with overcontrollers in negative control families showing the highest levels of internalizing problem behavior. However, high or low negative parental control did not make a difference for the resilient (Van Leeuwen et al., 2004). Further, the positive associations between family and peer coercion and both internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors were stronger for undercontrollers than for overcontrollers and resilient (Van Aken & Dubas, 2004). The same study reported that the effects of family and peer support on internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors were stronger for overcontrollers than for undercontrollers and resilient (Van Aken & Dubas, 2004).

Interaction effects between personality types and parent–child relationships on developmental outcomes have not appeared in all existing studies, however. In the studies by Dubas et al. (2002) and Van Leeuwen et al. (2004), cross-sectional examinations showed no interaction effects between personality types and positive parental control on problem behaviors. Moreover, a

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7326739>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7326739>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)